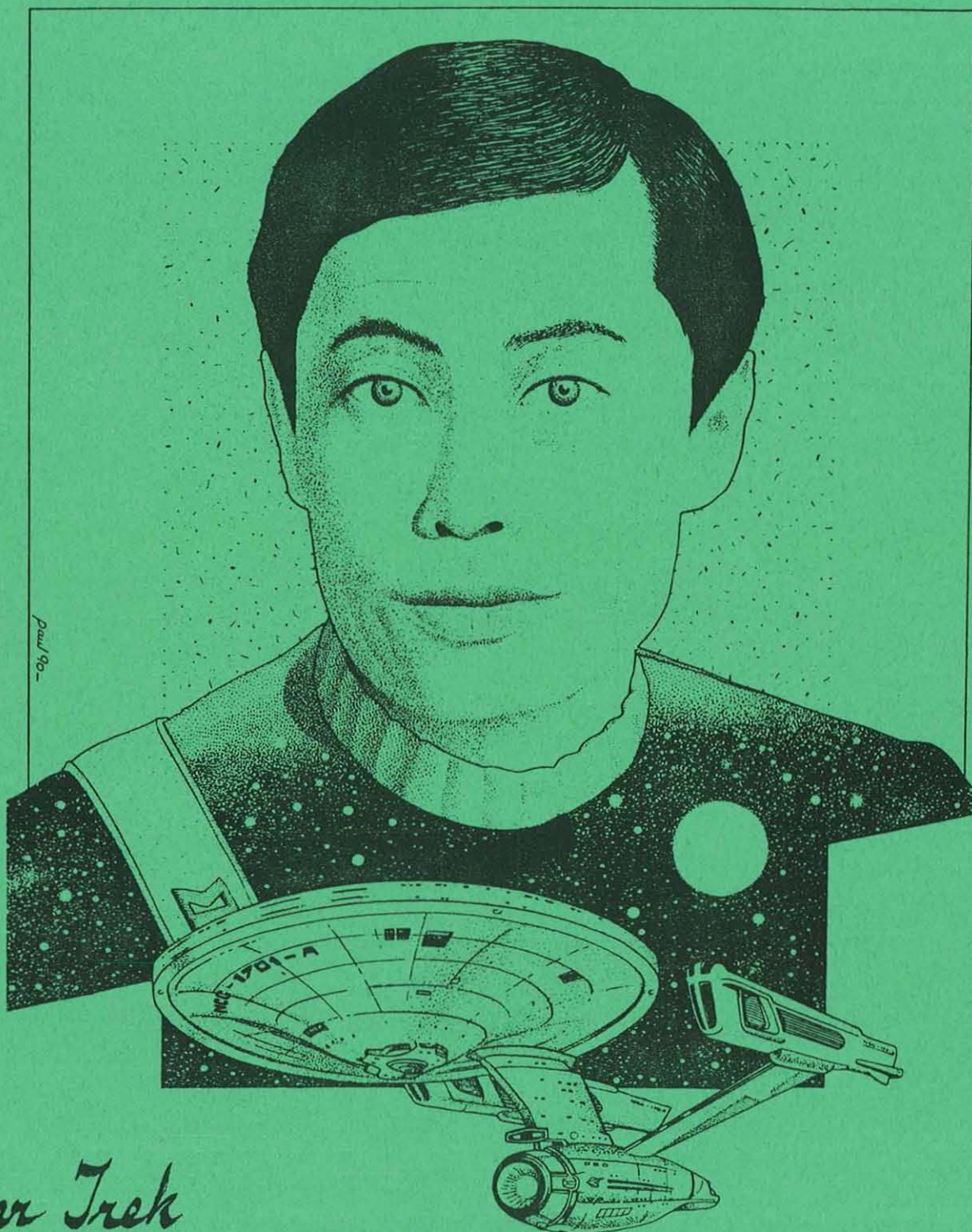


*SciFypress*

# ENTERPRISE

## LOG ENTRIES 87



*a  
Star Trek  
fanzine*

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# AMOK TIME PLUS ONE

by

Jean Sloan

"In a pig's eye!"

McCoy's words echoed after Spock as he followed his Captain to the Bridge. Outwardly the Vulcan had retained his equanimity; inwardly he was in turmoil. His emotional control had broken down: he felt great relief that Jim Kirk was alive; anger at T'Pring for involving Jim in the proceedings for her own ends; even greater anger at T'Pau for allowing combat to proceed as she had; and shame - so much shame. Shame that his friends, whom he had invited to stand by him, who were his and Vulcan's guests, had been treated thus; shame that he had laid himself bare before T'Pau, before McCoy, before Jim Kirk; and overwhelming shame at what he, Spock, had done to Kirk.

The pair reached the Bridge. Then there was the curiosity, the stares, kindly meant but torturing him at this moment. He felt he had to escape; he needed to meditate and calm his inner turbulence. He contemplated asking to be excused, but could not bring himself to do so and went to his station; perhaps burying himself in work would help.

As the Bridge settled to routine he felt a pair of eyes on him and looked up. It was Jim Kirk, his expression one of sympathy. He came over to Spock, and laid his hand gently on the Vulcan's shoulder.

"You look all in. I think you need a bit of peace and quiet after all the excitement. Why don't you go and get some rest?" His eyes twinkled. "It'll give the Bridge crew a chance to gossip and get their curiosity out of their systems. They won't ask any more awkward questions after that." The voice was gentle and full of compassion.

Spock stood and nodded. "Thank you, Captain." He couldn't bring himself to say more, and left quickly.

As Kirk watched Spock's retreating back a worried frown creased his forehead. He took a hesitant step after the Vulcan, but thought better of it. His instinct told him that Spock needed to be alone.

In his cabin, Spock did not immediately settle to meditation. Instead he stood staring into his firepot. Yet another feeling assailed him - puzzlement. He could not fathom Jim Kirk's reaction to him after what he had done to his Captain. He thought of the warmth, of the friendly concern that had overwhelmed him when Kirk had laid a hand on his shoulder. Kirk had been concerned for his well-being at the onset of pon farr, but that concern had been logical, a desire not to lose an asset to his command. He had used the weight of that command to make Spock explain his predicament. Then, illogically, he had defied his orders and risked his career to get the Vulcan to his home world. Now, after being insulted on the

planet and attacked by his First Officer, his concern seemed stronger. Kirk had called him his friend; was this... forgiving... what friendship was?

Spock changed into his meditation robe and composed himself to still the shocking turmoil in his being. He could not remember feeling so distraught - not since as a child when his schoolfellows had taunted him with his heritage and he had felt anger, hatred and great distress. Then his mother had seen his sorrow and had tried to comfort him, but he had drawn back from her; to surrender to the need for comfort would have made him less than Vulcan. Whether those boys had been right or wrong to act as they did was immaterial. Their treatment was a fact, and of no significance; it was illogical and a waste of energy to react emotionally to them. He had to accept their treatment and distance himself from it. That was what he had succeeded in doing then, and he must succeed now in the same way.

Spock set out to order his mind and repossess control. T'Pring had acted as was her right according to ancient tradition. Her choice of Kirk as her champion was quite logical. It was done; past. A waste of energy to feel anger.

T'Pau - her motives were less clear. She should have explained to Kirk the rules of combat, but she had chosen not to. Perhaps she had assumed that Spock had briefed his seconds fully... But no; T'Pau never assumed anything. Perhaps she had allowed Kirk to fight because she had wanted to save Spock, thereby saving family honour. No. Even this speculating was illogical. Kai'idth - what was, was. His own shame at the Vulcan treatment of Kirk and McCoy arose from his own sense of honour, but it was done. Past. Over.

As the threads of logic began to weave their web in Spock's brain he grew calmer. He turned his mind to tackle the horror he felt at his loss of control before, during and after Koon-ut-kal-if-fee. He could excuse himself for precarious control during pon farr; it was a time of shame for all Vulcan males, and so was to be accepted. But after - when he had beamed back to the Enterprise to surrender himself to justice, he had felt numb with disbelief at what had happened. He had been - still was - exhausted. He had resigned himself to court-martial and imprisonment; to death. The outside world had ceased to matter; he had felt distanced from it.

However, at the moment of hearing Jim Kirk's voice he had been flooded with a torrent of feelings. Shock first, then intense curiosity, both quite logical but quickly replaced by such intense relief as he had never felt before. Then the awful loss of control. The smiling. The exclamation of delight. The touching. He grew cold at the memory. And McCoy's face, amused. No, that was unfair. Glad for him. He was still angry with McCoy for letting him believe the Captain dead for so long, but the anger was illogical. McCoy had really had no way of letting him know sooner. And McCoy had tried to tell him as soon as he walked into Sickbay, but he had not let the Doctor speak.

His joy at seeing the Captain was more difficult to analyse, as was the Captain's reaction to him. He should be on a charge of assault, but Kirk had laughed when he had offered himself to the rule of law, and had expressed delight that Spock was alive and himself once more. The Captain had been angry with T'Pring for the way she had treated Spock; he had not complained about his own treatment. When Spock asked the Captain why he had accepted being T'Pring's champion, Kirk's explanation had surprised Spock; his only

thought had been to protect Spock, sure that he would never stand up to Stonn's strength in his weakened condition.

The realisation that all along concern for his First Officer's well-being had been the driving force behind Kirk's actions made Spock pause. Logical analysis would not serve him here. Kirk's attitude to him was not based on logic but on emotion, and so, Spock acknowledged, was his own reaction to Kirk. He had, he thought, been aware of this fact for a long time, but he had not been forced to confront it before. Now he had a decision to make. His loss of control had been total; his Human half had surfaced and, he realised, would do so again while he remained among Humans. He had chosen the Vulcan way at an early age; until now - or rather, until James Kirk came into his life - he had been sure of his Vulcanism. He had never questioned his control; he had kept himself aloof from the Humans surrounding him, and if he had felt lonely he had not been consciously aware of the fact. But Jim Kirk had breached his defences, and had made him less than Vulcan. He had to make a choice. He did not think he could stay with this man and continue to deny his Human feelings.

At that moment the door buzzer sounded. The door opened to admit McCoy carrying a tray covered with a white cloth. Spock raised an eyebrow but did not speak.

"I did some tests on those blood samples I took, Spock. You're what in a Vulcan passes for anaemic. I've brought a vitamin supplement for you to take." He uncovered the tray with a flourish, revealing a large bottle and a small measuring glass. "One measure, twice a day, until further notice."

"Thank you, Doctor." Spock's voice was toneless. He accepted the medication without further comment. "Will that be all?"

"Why yes, Spock. Get some rest." He looked at Spock appraisingly.

As McCoy left he regretted his earlier teasing of the Vulcan. Spock might deny his feelings, but he was obviously none too pleased with the Doctor. The Vulcan had never seemed so cold, and there was a tension about him that hinted at something deeper. The Doctor had intended returning to Sickbay, but on a whim he went instead to the Bridge.

The Captain was in the process of commanding a course change. After a moment he turned to the Doctor. "Well, Bones, it seems we're not indispensable at the Altair Six circus after all. New orders. Reports have just come in of a number of star systems completely dead out in the direction of the Mutara Nebula. We've been assigned to the investigation." Realising the pensive look on McCoy's face he changed his tone. "Problems?"

"I'm not sure." The Doctor glanced meaningfully at the empty science station.

"Look, I'm off duty in ten minutes. I'll come down to Sickbay. I wanted a word with you anyway. You can brief me then."

"Okay, Jim. I'll have a little pick-me-up ready."

. . . . .

McCoy's office was comfortably furnished. The Doctor frequently spent double shifts there, and he liked his little luxuries. Jim Kirk sank into one of the self-moulding armchairs and sighed, taking the drink which McCoy proffered.

"Tired, Jim?"

"Well, yes. But more worried - about Spock, in fact."

McCoy nodded. "I went to his cabin a little while ago. He was acting more Vulcan than Surak, but that's not unknown. He's reacted that way to trauma before, and god knows he's got good reason to be traumatised. There was more - a sort of tension about him that I've never encountered before."

"You don't think that his pon farr cycle is re-establishing itself?"

"No. His blood tests show that the hormone imbalance is gone. What aroused *your* concern, Jim?"

"Oh, nothing concrete. He seemed very subdued when we got back to the Bridge after leaving you in Sickbay, and the crew's curiosity was obviously distasteful to him. I relieved him of duty and sent him to get some rest. I felt he needed to be alone. If he had been Human I would have said that he was close to tears. I think..." He hesitated, seeking the right terms, "... that he is suffering from emotional overload. His hormonal condition lowered his defences in the first place, then we breached them completely by... playing tricks on him." Kirk spoke bitterly.

"Oh, c'mon, Jim. The situation couldn't be helped - you know that, and Spock understands it too. So, the great Wall of Vulcan has come tumbling down - about time too. He'll have to get over it. People do."

"But he's not Human, Bones. And I often think that we're guilty of trying to goad him into Human responses which are not natural to him."

"He is half Human, Jim. It's not healthy for him to bottle up his emotions. You don't try to goad him at all - I do that. You accept him for exactly what he is, which is why he's so loyal to you, and why he'll let his guard down with you."

"I think in this case that's exactly the trouble. He thinks he's let his guard down too far, and he doesn't know how to react next. He can't just pretend that nothing has happened. And how can you be so sure what's healthy for Spock? He is, after all, unique."

McCoy looked at his Captain unhappily. "I've no suggestions to make, Jim, except to suggest doing nothing."

"No, Bones. I'm going to see if he's all right."

"Then get him to eat something."

Spock knelt staring into his firepot, deep in meditation. He had turned up the thermostat. The firepot was the only light in the room, and its flickering reds cast dark shadows on the ceiling. The door buzzer sounded, but went unheeded.

Outside the cabin James Kirk frowned and buzzed again. He hesitated, but worry decided him. Using the security override he opened the door and entered.

The heat hit him like a wall. He looked at the satanic figure kneeling there and caught his breath, knowing, with complete certainty, that his diagnosis of Spock's state of mind had been correct, and he felt a sudden great sense of loss he could not exactly account for. He had never been so vividly aware of Spock's alienness as at this moment.

He was carrying a tray of food for himself and Spock, having intended to sit down to a meal with the Vulcan and talk his fears and shocks into proportion; he realised that the situation was far more serious than he had guessed, and his own solution - to talk it out - was essentially a Human one. He felt inadequate, as if he were intruding. Placing the tray quietly on the table, he turned to go.

"Thank you, Captain." Spock's voice stopped him in his tracks.

The Vulcan rose and went to the control panel on the wall. He turned up the lights and lowered the temperature, then started to change back into uniform.

Kirk felt awkward; Spock's demeanour forbade any discussion of personal problems.

"McCoy wants you to eat, Spock. He told me to bring you something."

"A yeoman could have done that. You wanted something else, perhaps, Captain?" As the Vulcan finished dressing he regarded Kirk coolly.

"Yes, dammit! I was worried about you. I wanted to be sure you were all right." Kirk felt frustrated, as though the Vulcan was toying with him, but he knew that was impossible. "You looked so..." he nearly said 'vulnerable', but thought better of it, "... ill after we returned from Vulcan. I thought you might..."

He tailed off. This was hopeless. He didn't know how to begin. Spock had changed. He was distant, uncommunicative, very like the Spock Kirk had encountered on his first day on the Enterprise.

"You thought I was upset and that I needed - what would the good Doctor say? - a shoulder to cry on. Well, you were quite correct, Captain. Please sit down - I want to explain something to you."

Kirk complied, confused by the contrast between the content and tone of the speech.

"When I came back from the planet I was resigned to court martial and death; then you were alive, and I was relieved and glad. I made an exhibition of my feelings."

"But Spock, that's nothing to be ashamed of."

"It is for a Vulcan. You showed concern for my welfare, and I think you understood my conflicting emotions. Your concern and understanding broke me more thoroughly than my belief that you were



dead. I came here and could barely suppress my tears. And I felt deep shame because my control had gone."

"But you are in control now." Kirk felt an overwhelming sense of foreboding about what was to come next.

"Possibly, yes. But for how long, Jim?"

"Spock, have I got this straight? You don't want me to care for you because my concern might affect you by making you feel emotion you don't want to feel?"

"Essentially, yes."

"So you do not wish to feel friendship for me?"

Spock looked at his Captain for a moment before replying. "I... do have deep feelings of friendship, of... care... for you, Jim. This incident has pushed me to acknowledge the depth of those feelings for the first time. They belong to my Human half..."

"And you don't want to be Human, you want to be Vulcan." It was a statement, not a question. "Why can't you be both, Spock?"

At the wistfulness in his Captain's voice Spock felt a tremor run through his control, but he remained firm. "Captain, it is not a matter for discussion. I cannot continue to serve in close proximity to one who is capable of affecting me so deeply. I am going to request a transfer to an all-Vulcan ship."

The silence stretched between them. For once in his life James T. Kirk had nothing to say. In fact, he could not think at all. he could not believe what was happening. His throat and eyes burned, and he swallowed convulsively. He would not let Spock see how deeply he felt. He took a deep breath.

"I'd be sorry to see you go; but are you sure you want an all-Vulcan vessel? You are long overdue for promotion. It would make more sense for your career if I were to recommend you for a captaincy. A Captain can keep himself aloof from his crew, if he so chooses; personal attachments can be avoided." He kept his voice even; no-one would ever know what it cost him to do so.

Spock looked at his Captain curiously, sensing the tension in him, guessing its origin, surprised at the Human's control.

"No, Jim. I have never desired command. The position of Science Officer on the Intrepid is about to become vacant. T'Rhena is pregnant and will return to Vulcan. I will apply for transfer to that ship."

"As you wish." Kirk heard himself speak the words in measured tones, but another part of his brain was contemplating life without his First Officer. He feared that he could not maintain his composure much longer - he had to escape.

He stood up. "There's no need to file a transfer application. I have a few strings I can pull."

He left hurriedly without waiting for a reply. When he reached his quarters he extended a bemused hand for the brandy bottle before he called McCoy.

. . . . .

Spock looked round his empty cabin, now denuded of the artifacts which had provided sparse decoration and had given the room its Vulcan atmosphere. Events had moved swiftly. Kirk had smoothed his transfer and now, only six weeks later, he was packed and ready to leave.

The previous evening had seen his farewell party. He had not wanted to indulge in the so-Human event, but when he had expressed this wish to McCoy the Doctor had rounded on him angrily, calling him selfish and pointing out that whatever Spock's feelings about it, people on the Enterprise cared very much about the Vulcan, and wanted to wish him well. So he had capitulated.

It had proved a painful evening - he would admit that much - but the private farewell from Jim Kirk, which he had feared, had not materialised. Jim had kept the tone of the evening light, and had seemed to be having a good time. In fact, Spock was beginning to think that Jim had accepted the situation. During the last few weeks they had continued as usual with ship's business, and there had been the odd chess match. Jim had at no time referred to Spock's imminent departure except in the line of duty or in very positive terms, making no emotional demands whatsoever on the Vulcan.

Spock ruthlessly quashed the sense of loss that was beginning to engulf him, and turned to leave the cabin. The ship was nearing Starbase 20, where Spock would disembark and where he would have to cool his heels (McCoy's description) for nine days, awaiting transfer. He had a few final duties to attend to on the Bridge before handing over to Chekov as temporary Science Officer.

Jim Kirk was not on the Bridge. He was in his cabin, ostensibly catching up on paperwork. In reality he was standing in front of his bathroom mirror staring at the tired face that looked back at him. In inner tension of the last few weeks had taken its toll.

After Spock's words to him he had vowed not to express his feelings at the Vulcan's leaving - he would treat him as he would treat any member of the crew about to be reassigned - but he was not doing that at this moment. He was aware that he was avoiding the Vulcan; he dreaded having to say goodbye. Though he had not told Spock how he truly felt he now knew that for his own sake he must show the Vulcan what his leaving meant to him, otherwise he would always wonder if such a revelation could have changed Spock's mind. He felt in his soul that it would not.

McCoy had argued long and hard with Spock about his reasons for leaving. He had called Spock a coward, and had accused him of running away. McCoy was concerned for the Vulcan's mental health, and had said so, but Spock had remained immovable. The good Doctor had then turned his attention to Kirk to try and force the Captain to 'have it out' with Spock, but Jim Kirk would not comply. If he had succeeded in making Spock stay he would have felt guilty about the moral blackmail involved. He seriously doubted if his words would have had any effect anyway.

When Spock arrived on the bridge he was surprised to see both Uhura and Chekov present; both were officially off duty. The crew knew that Spock was going, but they did not know why; as the grapevine had told them that it was not for promotion, and that Spock's new ship was Vulcan, speculation was rife. Uhura had guessed something of the cause, but only instinctively - she had no evidence.

The Vulcan crossed to his station and worked at the computer for some time; then he sat back, unloaded a tape which he left on the console, and stood up, ready to make his exit. As he turned to the well of the Bridge he realised that he was the cynosure of all eyes.

Chekov cleared his throat as Sulu whispered, "Go on!"

"Meester Spock, sair, I have something to say on behalf of the Bridge crew."

Spock stood rigid.

"Meester Spock, we want to wish you good luck. We have been honoured to have the opportunity to serve with you, and we are werry envious of the crew that you are going to. We hope they appreciate you as much as we do. That's all, sair. Bridge Watch - attention!"

A yeoman stepped forward with a bosun's whistle, and the full complement of officers came smartly to attention and saluted once. Then without further fuss they returned to their duties.

Spock moved to leave, but before he could gain the safety of the turbolift Uhura faced him.

"Sir, the Captain would like to see you in his quarters in fifteen minutes to complete your signing off." Then, emboldened by his silence, she added, "And I do wish you weren't going. He'll miss you so much, and so will I. Your fights with Dr McCoy have been the light of my life since I joined the ship."

"Lieutenant..."

"I know - I shouldn't. I'm sorry, Mr Spock. Just consider it a Human failing."

"Lieutenant, live long and prosper."

"I'll try, Mr Spock."

And Spock of Vulcan walked off the bridge of the Enterprise.

However, once in the turbolift his dignified pose slipped somewhat. He leaned against the wall, feeling weak and drained, trying to compose himself against the feeling of loss which had returned with renewed force. He did not think he could face Jim Kirk at that moment; he had to calm himself. He had ten minutes before he was due in the Captain's quarters; his own cabin was no longer a sanctuary, so he headed for the Observation Deck, where there were mediation booths for privacy.

The Observation Deck was deserted, the lights dimmed, as he had expected at this time of day. He did not activate the lighting panels; his Vulcan eyes found the reduced light restful. Spock crossed to the main viewscreen and looked out at the stars. He felt almost light-headed, empty, devoid of emotion. For the first time since making his decision he contemplated life without this ship, without those people on the Bridge.

He had chosen... what? Aloneness. Being solitary. This hollowness within would always be his state now. He could never return to being the Vulcan he had been before Jim Kirk came into his

life. Putting aside feeling left a gap which his Vulcan life would provide nothing to fill. It occurred to him that he had made a mistake, but he quashed the idea almost before it was born. Too late. Kai'idth - what is, is.

Suddenly he became aware of sound from one of the meditation booths facing the viewscreen. A choked voice, Jim Kirk's, had said one word, "Damn!"

The door to the booth was open. Stepping forward, Spock was able to see the occupant, who remained unaware of his presence. The Captain was standing leaning on the doorpost, staring out into space, his face illuminated by the reflected glow. His eyes, looking unseeingly into the void, were unnaturally bright. He repeated, "Damn, damn, damnit!" and thumped his fist violently against the door. Then he sat down and put his head in his hands.

Spock stood transfixed, unsure what to do. He was embarrassed at being an eavesdropper, but stronger than embarrassment was an overwhelming need to comfort the man in front of him. He stepped forward and knelt, putting his hand gently on the Captain's shoulder.

"Jim, what's wrong?" Concern was evident in his voice.

Jim Kirk looked up, startled to see the gentle dark eyes regarding him. He stared at the Vulcan mutely, tears wet on his face.

"I'll call McCoy. Captain, you are ill."

Kirk found his voice. "No, don't do that. I'm sorry, Spock. I'm indulging in a little Human emotionalism. I can't help it. I don't want you to go. I'll miss you - I feel as if part of me is being torn away. I came here to try and calm myself before I had to say goodbye to you, but I'm afraid it hasn't worked."

He looked wearily at Spock, who was sitting back on his heels, a bleak look on his face. He had wanted to spare the Vulcan such a scene, but then it was Spock's own fault for coming. Why was he here, anyway? Kirk looked closely at the Vulcan, noting the aura of weariness which surrounded him. The gentle expression in his eyes had been replaced by an unfocussed blankness, as though he could not see. Jim reached out and pulled the Vulcan towards him, not very gently.

"Spock, what's wrong with you? You look awful."

The eyes focussed slowly, as though coming out of a trance. "Jim, I..." And Spock fainted dead away.

"He's going to be fine, Jim. It's exhaustion. I should have seen it. I knew he was anaemic - I was treating him for that - but I was so busy trying to deflect him from leaving that I didn't notice any change in him. He's worn himself to a frazzle, and mixed in is his reaction to pon farr and the physiological changes it induced, not to mention the psychological ones. He's suffered a complete mood swing from the emotional abandon of pon farr to the complete suppression of emotion he has been attempting in the last few weeks. All Vulcans probably experience the increased need to control after the mating drive, but other Vulcans don't have Spock's

Human side to contend with. My problem is that I'm in unknown waters here. All my diagnoses are based on common sense and speculation rather than medical fact. To be frank, Jim, I doubt that his logic circuits were working properly when he made the decision to leave the ship. I tried to tell him to wait until he was recovered before making such a final decision, but he wouldn't listen."

"And I didn't help by remaining distant, did I?"

"No, but you did as he asked you to. And it's very difficult to conceive of our logical Vulcan not knowing what he's doing."

"I should have listened to you, Bones - had it out with him before everything became so... *final*."

"Well, he's not going anywhere just now. You'd better tell Starbase 20 that he's indisposed."

Kirk organised the necessary message. To his surprise Uhura sounded quite pleased that Spock was ill. Then he returned to Sickbay.

"I've given him a sedative, Jim. There's nothing more you can do here now. Go and get some rest. Come back in the morning."

"I'm still on duty, Bones."

"Well, take yourself off. You look awful, too."

At 2.00am Jim Kirk finally gave up trying to sleep and returned to Sickbay. Everything was quiet. McCoy was not there. Kirk nodded to the duty nurse and went into the side room where Spock was sleeping. The face on the pillow looked serene now, though Spock's colour was not good. Kirk pulled up a chair and sat down, leaning on the bed. Time passed. The Captain's head slipped forward, and he slept at last.

Spock woke in the early hours of the morning, conscious of a weight on his side. He opened his eyes to see the Captain slumped across him. Raising his hand he gently stroked the dishevelled brown hair, looking at the still figure thoughtfully. He felt calm, clear-headed; the events of the past days seemed misty.

*Can he care for me so much?* he thought.

Kirk stirred and woke with a groan. As he raised his head gingerly off the bed and massaged his neck to remove the kinks, he became aware of Spock's steady gaze. He smiled hesitantly at his First Officer, unsure of Spock's reaction to his presence.

"How do you feel, Spock?"

"Tired, Jim."

The admission surprised Kirk. Spock must really be below par.

"Then I'll leave you to sleep." He rose to go, but Spock caught his arm.

"Jim, I do not understand why you can still care for me as you



do when I tried to kill you and then rejected your friendship."

Kirk looked Spock straight in the eye and said almost defiantly. "I... It's difficult to explain. You're worth caring for. The business on Vulcan... it wasn't your fault, any of it. It was T'Pol's fault if blame has to be attached. But none of it matters - it's past. No, that's not true. It does matter, because it has destroyed the relationship that was growing between us." He spoke bitterly. "I'm sorry, Spock. I won't give you cause to faint again."

As he turned to go he missed seeing Spock reaching out a hand to him. At the door, and regretting the bitterness of his parting comment, he turned. "Do you want me to get you anything?" he asked gently.

Glancing back at Spock as he spoke, he became aware of the anguished look on the Vulcan's face. "Spock, what's wrong?"

The Vulcan sank back onto the pillows with a groan. "Jim, I..." Spock choked on the word.

Kirk crossed quickly back to the bed and sat down on its edge. Spock, eyes closed, was breathing deeply. Kirk put a hand on his shoulder and shook him very gently.

"Spock, look at me."

"I cannot." More deep breaths bespoke Spock's great effort to control. Then a voice, almost a whisper. "Jim, I have lost myself. I no longer know who or what I am." The voice cracked on the last word, and the word became a dry little sob. Spock put his hands over his face.

Jim Kirk could stand it no longer. He pulled the Vulcan roughly into a sitting position and into his arms, holding him tightly, almost fiercely.

"You are Spock of Vulcan, the best First Officer in the fleet. You are truly Vulcan - you have not denied your nature by allowing the time of pon farr to break down your defences. You will rebuild them with time, and with a return to full health. You are my friend, and I feel great affection for you. I do not ask you to return my affection except as you have always done - by your loyalty and devotion. You are as you are. But I will not allow you to make a decision which will affect your whole career while you are in this state of mind. I'm withdrawing your transfer to the Intrepid. You're going to rest and get well, then if you still want to leave we will properly and logically arrange something which will further develop your career."

He pushed Spock away from him and took hold of his shoulders in a still-fierce grip. "Do you hear me, Spock? You're going nowhere for the time being."

The eyes before him had opened wide in surprise; then they softened. "Jim, I do believe that I am glad. I think that perhaps my logic has faltered in the last few weeks."

"You mean you made a mistake. I shouldn't have taken any notice in the first place. I should have taken McCoy's advice and had it out with you then."

"I doubt whether it would have made any difference, Jim. I had to realise my mistake myself. It is the nature of all living things to learn primarily by experience."

This last was said in such a familiar Spock-like tone that Kirk laughed aloud in pure delight. He felt the Vulcan's body begin to relax under his grasp and the dark eyes suddenly looked very weary.

"C'mon, Spock, you need sleep."

As he helped to make Spock comfortable he became aware that he was being watched. He looked up at Spock and smiled.

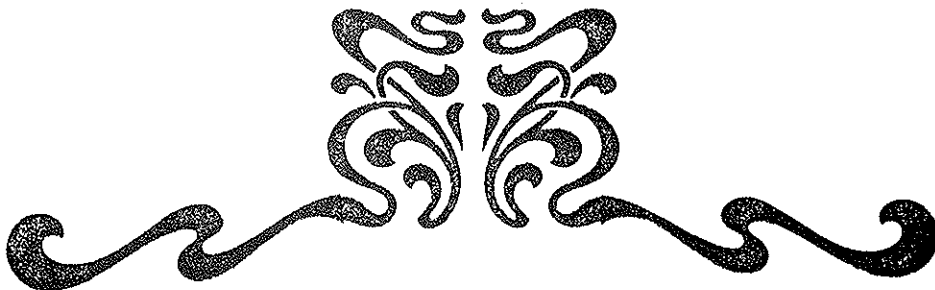
"Jim, thank you. I acknowledge your friendship and its value. I am sorry I hurt you. You did not deserve it."

Kirk did not attempt to repudiate the apology. He had been hurt - deeply hurt - but it no longer mattered. He took Spock's hand and squeezed it; as he did so the Vulcan's eyes closed in sleep.

Several hours later McCoy, coming on duty, found them there, both still asleep, Kirk's head resting on the bed, their hands interlocked. A deep sigh of relief escaped him. "Thank god!" he whispered. Then he went into his office and thumbed the intercom.

"Uhura, book the Captain calls to Starfleet Command and the Intrepid for about two hours' time. I think that he might have some messages to send."

As he switched off he was sure he heard cheers from the Bridge.



## FOR MIRI

Don't cry, girl.  
You weren't to know he couldn't be yours to care for.  
You think that you're the first one to have loved him  
And found out far too late his soul's been claimed?

Be strong, girl.  
I know you feel his sickness and his suffering,  
But his friends have staked their claim to be there with him,  
And will protect him.



Teresa Abbott

# I DIDNA' COME UP THE CLYDE IN A BANANA BOAT

by

Joyce Devlin

As the transporter released the last traveller onto the Enterprise the ship's Captain pounced.

"Don't you realise it's against regulations to beam unauthorised goods aboard?" Kirk growled as the new officer stepped down.

"Permission to come aboard, sir?"

"Permission granted, and I asked you a question. I would like an answer."

"Ach, Captain, I didna' come up the Clyde in a banana boat. Dae ye seriously think I'd bring onything aboard that wid hurt Scotty's bairns? Awa' ye go - he'd hae ma guts for garters!" the new Commander rattled off in the broadest Scottish accent Kirk had ever heard.

"I beg your pardon - could you please repeat that," Kirk said, looking at Spock.

"Oh, sorry, sir. Sometimes I get carried awa' wi' masel. These are for Mr. Scott, sir," the Commander said just as the Chief Engineer swept into the transporter room.

"It's yersel, Alisdair. Is something wrong, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Scott, there is. Are these boxes yours?" Kirk asked.

"Aye, sir. Well, one is."

"Would you mind telling me what's in it?"

"Technical manuals, sir." Scotty looked at his feet.

"And the other one, Commander McDougall?"

"Ach weel, ye see, Captain, it's like this. The ither box has a wee bevvie in it so Scotty and I can go on the bevvie."

Kirk looked helplessly at his Engineer. "Can you translate please, Scotty."

"Well... er... he means there's alcohol in it, sir."

"I see. What kind of alcohol?"

"Er...a gallon of whisky, sir," Alisdair McDougall replied.

"May I ask why you did not say that in the beginning, Commander?" Spock asked.

"I did, sir."

"Commander Spock, a bevvy's a drink, and to go on the bevvy means to have a drink," Scott explained quickly.

"I see," Kirk said finally. "Welcome aboard, Commander. Dismissed." He left the transporter room with Mr. Spock.

McDougall turned to Scott as the doors closed behind the two senior officers. "Whit's up wi' them? Did they think ma head buttons up the back, Scotty?"

"Naw, laddie, they just didna' understand the way ye talk. Try and no' be sae broad. Noo let's get these boxes doon tae ma quarters, and you tae Sickbay."

"Can we go get something tae eat after? Ah'm that hungry Ah could eat a scabby-heided wean."

As the two Scots picked up the boxes and left, deep in conversation, Transporter Chief Kyle stood listening, understanding only one word in five.

In the turbolift Kirk looked at Spock. "What was that he said about the Clyde, Spock?"

"He said that he did not come up the Clyde in a banana boat. However, I do not understand his reference."

"I didn't get guts and garters either, did you?"

"I believe it was 'guts for garters', Jim."

"Spock, I think we're going to need Scotty to translate for us, especially since as Security Chief McDougall will be on most of the landing parties with us," Kirk said, then suddenly laughed aloud.

"I do not find the situation amusing."

"He'll be down in Sickbay for his medical by now. Poor Bones."

"I believe Dr. McCoy is quite capable of fathoming out what our new Commander says."

"He can hardly understand you at times, Spock," Kirk teased.

"I speak quite clearly, Captain," Spock said serenely.

In Sickbay McCoy was busy with the physical. "So you're from Glasgow, Commander?" he asked.

"Aye, born 'n' bred in Glesga, Ah wis."

"I see from your record you've been teaching in Starfleet's Scottish training centre for the last two years."

"Aye, that's right. Ah copped ma whack o' teaching, asked for a transfer, and ended up here."

"Copped ma whack? You mean, you had your fill?" McCoy guessed.

"Aye, that's right, Doctor."

. . . . .

Three weeks later Kirk had had enough of the Chief of Security's Glasgow patter, and had told him in no uncertain terms that there was to be no more of it; he was to speak Federation Standard, and that was that.

The Scot had said he understood, and asked if Kirk wished another security officer to accompany the landing party that day.

Kirk had said no, which was fortunate, for within an hour of the beam down there was trouble.

McDougall was jumped first. Before he could warn the others the Romulan had him by the throat in a vice-like grip.

"Drop your weapons!"

Kirk reached for his phaser rather too quickly.

"I said drop your weapons, or I'll kill him."

"All right, drop them," Kirk ordered.

The landing party threw down their weapons. When the Romulans had gathered them up their leader released the Security Chief.

"You all right, McDougall?" Kirk asked.

"Aye, sir. Sorry, sir - they appeared out of nowhere."

"What do you want with us?" Kirk asked the Romulan leader as he weighed up the odds. They were not good - twenty against eight.

"Your ship."

"Not on your life!" Kirk spat back.

The Romulan Commander walked round the Enterprise group, grabbed Christine Chapel by the hair and forced her to kneel. "Call your ship, Captain, or I kill her."

"No, Captain, don't!" Chapel cried out before she was silenced by a blow across the face.

"You Romulan pig!" McCoy yelled as he leapt forward angrily.

McDougall floored him with one swift move, knocking him out of the path of a disruptor beam. "No, Doctor."

"I said, call your ship," the Romulan repeated.

"No."

The Commander levelled his disruptor at Christine Chapel's head. "I give you to the count of five, then I kill her. One. Two. Three."

"Jim!" McCoy shouted.

"Four."

"I'll call the ship," McDougall said. "Just let her live."

"McDougall, I'll court martial you for this!" Kirk exploded.



"I'll call the ship," McDougall repeated as he took out his communicator. "Ma heid disna' button up the back, Jimmy," he added.

Kirk looked at Spock as the penny dropped. "Commander, I'm giving you a direct order not to call the ship," he said. He had seen though McDougall's ploy, and hoped to lull any suspicion the Romulan might have.

"No tricks!" the Commander warned.

"Awa' ye go - Ah'm nae that daft," McDougall replied.

"Speak Standard!"

"He always speaks like that. He is Scottish," Spock said calmly.

The Romulan clearly did not understand what McDougall had said, but took the Vulcan's word that it was his normal mode of speech - after all, it was a documented fact that Vulcans do not lie.

"Very well, Commander. Order them to transport us up on a wide beam. And remember - no tricks, or the woman dies."

McDougall flipped open the communicator. "Haw Scotty, help ma Boab! Transport on wide beam. It's like Setterday nicht in Barrowland doon here, teeming wi' heidbangers. Chris is aboot tae cop her lot an' Jimmy's hae'in kittens, sae shift yer big bahookey. The ba's on the slates. McDougall oot."

The Romulan looked confused, but the instruction about the transporter had been clear enough. "What else did you say?" he asked suspiciously. "I said no tricks."

"Ah didna' play ony!" McDougall said, adding, "That wis a pal o' mines Ah wis talkin' tae - if Ah hadna' rabbited oan a bit he'd've kent something wis wrang."

"You translate," the Commander ordered Spock.

"He said that the transporter operator is his friend, and would have expected him to communicate in the fashion he did. If he had spoken Standard it would have aroused suspicion. Mr McDougall is concerned for the safety of Nurse Chapel, and is following your directions."

The Romulan released Chris Chapel, satisfied at all was going to plan.

On the Enterprise Scott sprang from the command chair and crossed to Uhura's station. "Red alert, Uhura. Contact Security and have a team meet me in the transporter room. We're expecting guests. Sulu, you have the con."

"Scotty, what on earth's going on?" Uhura asked.

"Sorry, lass, no time tae explain." He vanished into the turbolift.

Scott took the transporter controls himself. The Enterprise party materialised on the platform.

"Scotty, you're a marvel. Where are they?" Kirk asked as he stepped off the platform.

"In the beam, sir. Right, you lot," he added to the Security team, "get ready."

"Bring them in, Mr. Scott."

No sooner had the transporter released the Romulans than the Enterprise Security guards disarmed them.

"You lied!" the Commander accused Spock.

"I did not lie. You asked me to translate what Commander McDougall said to you, not what he said to Mr Scott. I did so," Spock replied calmly.

"Right, take them to the brig," Kirk ordered. "Commander, what *did* you say you say to Scotty?" he added, turning to McDougall.

"Jist that it wis like Barrowland on a Setterday night," McDougall replied innocently.

"Scotty?"

"Barrowland is a Glasgow dance hall. On a Saturday night it's always full of hard men and fighting, so I knew ye were in trouble as soon as he mentioned heidbangers, Captain."

"I see. Well done, both of you. Commander McDougall, perhaps you should introduce classes in Glaswegian for all Security personnel. It could come in quite useful. Oh, and McDougall, forget what I said this morning. You saved the ship."

"Aye, sir," Alisdair McDougall replied serenely.

#### GLOSSARY

About  
Ba's up on the slates  
Bevvy  
Cop her lot  
Copped ma whack  
Didna  
Doon  
Fur  
Hae  
Help ma Boab  
Heid  
Heidbangers  
Jimmy's hae'in kittens  
Ken  
Masel'  
On the bevvy  
Scabby-headed wean  
Shift yer big bahookey  
Wid  
Wrang  
Yersel'

About  
The game's up  
Alcohol  
Get hurt  
Had enough  
Did not  
Down  
For  
Have  
Help me  
Head  
Violent unstable thugs  
Jim is very upset  
Know  
Myself  
Out drinking  
Child with a scalp infection  
Shift your big backside - Get moving  
Would  
Wrong  
Yourself



# THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS!

by

Lesley C E Thompson

The orange sky blazed overhead. Not even the smallest cloud marred the heavens, the ground was hard baked and dusty; even the purplish greenery native to this hot arid world drooped in the unrelenting heat.

The two Starfleet officers, both in standard uniform, walked steadily in the direction of a low cluster of buildings approximately 20 yards distant.

"Thank God!" the shorter of the two men exclaimed into the silence. "At last." He wiped sweat from his brow, for the hundredth time.

His companion said nothing, only glanced swiftly in his direction and increased his pace.

"All right, Spock, no need to run." McCoy could feel the heat sapping his energy.

"My apologies, Doctor, I assumed that you were eager to reach our destination." Spock slowed, waiting for the Doctor to catch up.

"Yeah, right." The Doctor came to a standstill and turned to the Vulcan, silently cursing the fact that Spock was totally unaffected by the heat. Indeed, it probably felt like a nice cool Spring day to him. "What exactly is the scientific team here studying, anyway?"

Spock stared back at the Human Doctor; exasperation, quickly suppressed, flickered briefly across his face.

Dr. McCoy, busy wiping dust and grit out of his eyes, failed to see the Vulcan's mask slip.

"Doctor, why did you accompany me? You obviously have no interest in the subject under investigation."

"Just curious, I guess." McCoy shrugged his shoulders as sweat trickled down his spine. "Let's just get out of this heat before I, for one, melt."

Spock resumed his steady pacing, pondering the significance of the Doctor's words and, indeed, his presence here. *Curious about what? Surely McCoy knows that I did not wish for his company. What is he up to?*

Eventually the two men reached the Science Compound's gate and, with a sigh of relief from McCoy, they entered and made their way to the main building. Spock tapped firmly on the door but, receiving no reply, pushed it open and entered.

The room was blessedly cool and dark after the heat outside. The Vulcan's eyes adjusted sooner than the Human's, and he saw that the room was empty of personnel. On a desk by the heavily shaded window a computer terminal blinked and hummed purposefully to itself. Now that McCoy had recovered somewhat from the long walk he studied the room with interest, taking note of various charts and diagrams lining the walls. Two further doors were on the opposite wall. *Hopefully*, thought McCoy, *they might be the way to a cold drink and a cold shower.*

"Well, Spock, where's the welcome committee?" McCoy slumped into one of the easy chairs arranged at one end of the room.

"As we arrived here together, I don't see how you can logically expect me to have any more information than yourself." As he spoke, the Vulcan moved swiftly over to the desk and keyed in a code to the computer. The screen lit and a woman's image arranged itself and began to speak.

"Live long and prosper, Spock." Her voice was low. Her features were classically Vulcan and dark hair pushed back from her high smooth forehead and fastened with a brightly coloured headband hung heavily down over her shoulders. "I apologise for my absence, but my spouse and I have had to travel to sector 3 reference 45.32, as the conclusion of our experiments has advanced more rapidly than forecast." She paused. "Please enter Access code WE-18-41-12-B if you wish to study the results so far. We will return in 1.75 days." The slim fingers parted in the usual salute, and the message faded.

McCoy, who had gathered together enough energy to stagger to Spock's side and peer owlshly over his shoulder, whistled silently as he viewed the screen, *I wonder*, he thought, *what they do with the ugly girls on Vulcan?* So far he'd not seen one that wouldn't cause a riot in any bar on a frontier planet.

Spock meanwhile entered the code and was busy absorbing the information as it scrolled past.

McCoy lost interest in the proceedings and wandered aimlessly around the small neat room. Realising that he still hadn't had a drink and was very thirsty, he decided to look for the kitchen.

He soon found a neat, well-stocked kitchen, and set about making himself a cold drink. Unfortunately there was no alcohol, so he settled for fruit juice. Taking that and a pitcher of cold fresh water back into the main room, he found Spock still engrossed in his study of the computer screen.

"Hey, Spock." McCoy indicated the pitcher. "Do ya wanna drink?"

"Thank you, Doctor." Spock stood and walked over to pour himself a drink; sipping slowly he sat opposite the Doctor. "We are scheduled to return in 3.65 hours," he said. "I suggest you take the opportunity to refresh yourself before we have to make the journey back to the beam down point."

McCoy nodded, and rose from his seat. "Spock... " He hesitated. "Just tell me what all this is about?"

"Biology."

For one wild moment McCoy thought that Spock was referring to

his own biology. The face of the young Vulcan female flashed into his mind - then he realised that Spock would hardly discuss his personal life with him.

"Biology. Biology as in plants...?" McCoy managed to get out.

"Yes, Doctor, plants." Spock was aware of the Doctor's initial reaction and silently chided himself for his impulse to tease. "Scientist T'Ela, who left the message, is head of a Federation project attempting to adapt various tender plants for use in harsher conditions, such as those on my home planet."

"Right, I see." But he didn't. *What interest can Spock have in plants? He's not a botanist in his spare time, like Sulu,* "Er... What...?" McCoy broke off, not sure of the question he wanted to ask.

Spock lifted an eyebrow. "You have a question?" he asked, secretly enjoying the Human's discomfort. McCoy shook his head disconsolately. "In that case, Doctor, I will contact T'Ela directly, I have a request to make. The bathroom is next to the kitchen."

McCoy reluctantly left and made his way to the bathroom, still burning with curiosity as to Spock's purpose for visiting this part of the planet during what was supposed to be his shore leave. Sighing, he thought, *I should have gone with Scotty to the city. I'm too nosey for my own good. It's just that Spock taking time off is so... so unusual.* He was still trying to figure out what the Vulcan was up to as he headed back to the living area.

Spock himself was nowhere to be seen, so McCoy sat down at the desk. Looking around, he noticed the diagrams again. They seemed to be genetic charts for a variety of plants. On the desk top was one roll of charts that didn't match the rest. Feeling vaguely like an eavesdropper, McCoy carefully unrolled the bundle of papers and studied them. There were detailed studies of cell structures, each cell minutely detailed. Various processes were outlined, apparently giving each stage of development, though McCoy couldn't be sure because all the notations were in a very neat and precise Vulcan script with no standard translation. *Odd, I thought Spock said this was a Federation project.*

Just then Spock came back into the room carrying a small box about 8 inches square. This he set down carefully on a table, then he looked at the Doctor. McCoy gave a guilty start.

"Oh, Spock. Got what you came for?"

"Yes, Doctor, T'Ela was able to supply what I wanted," Spock indicated. "Do you wish to eat before we have to leave? T'Ela informed me that the kitchen is well stocked."

"Yeah, sure." McCoy only then realised how hungry he was. "I hope there's something fit for non-Vulcans."

"I would assume so, as T'Ela would hardly risk poisoning her spouse."

"Her husband's Human?" McCoy's surprise showed clearly.

"Yes, Matthew Jameson is a well-known research biologist." Spock was as blandly impassive as usual.



"Oh." McCoy subsided into silence for a moment. "Does he read Vulcan?" he asked, attempting nonchalance.

"I do not know, but I should think it unlikely." Spock faced the doctor. "Why?"

"I was looking at the charts." McCoy picked one off the desk. "This one's all in Vulcan."

"That is because it is mine." Spock took the paper from the Doctor and rolled it up with the rest.

"Yours!" McCoy's jaw dropped. "What are you up to?"

"Doctor." Spock's voice was clipped. "I am not 'up to' anything. My private concerns are no concern of yours."

He turned and headed off into the kitchen, leaving an even more puzzled Doctor behind.

While Spock was fixing a meal, McCoy sat down in the lounge and admitted to himself that Spock had him good and proper this time. *What on Earth is he up to? What's in that box?* He stared intently at the inoffensive box as if it could tell him the secret if only he could look hard enough.

Spock came back bearing two laden plates. He passed one to McCoy; the Doctor peered warily at the strange looking dish. However it certainly smelt good, so smiling briefly at the Vulcan he took up his fork and began to eat.

Spock took his tray over to the desk and resumed his study of the data.

As McCoy ate he became even more obsessed with the reason behind this visit. Obviously it wasn't social - their hosts hadn't even turned up. He knew he would have to ask again, so girding his loins, so to speak, he swallowed a last mouthful and put the plate aside. "Thanks, Spock, that was delicious." He took a deep breath and continued, feigning disinterest, "Exactly why did you come here?"

Spock turned to the Doctor, as if coming to a decision. "To collect some samples for a private project. There was no need for you to accompany me; I did not request it." He raised a brow quizzically. "Why did you come?"

McCoy stood and gathered up the dishes. "I don't really know. Just an impulse, I guess."

Spock watched the Doctor disappear into the kitchen and mentally let out a sigh. Despite the size of the Enterprise it was still only a ship, and Spock found himself frequently irritated by the lack of privacy on board. In his quarters he had created a sanctuary, an oasis of calm, away from his Human shipmates, but he still had to use the Science Labs for any experimental work. Spock left the desk and picked up the small box he had retrieved from T'Ela's storage room. According to the latest information this strain was the one; it should stand up to the difficult conditions on Vulcan. He would test it in his quarters - at least the last stage of his personal project could take place there, where a Vulcan

environment was already maintained.

McCoy washed up and tidied the kitchen, still puzzling over Spock's peculiar leave, and his own motives for coming. *After all, he thought, I could be sitting by a pool with a long cold beer and a pretty girl.* With a sigh he returned to the living area. Looking across at the engrossed Vulcan, he felt a surge of affection for the Science Officer. *Despite our differences, I can't help but like the pointy eared over-grown hobgoblin!* "Well, Spock, when do we head back?" McCoy asked.

"To arrive at the beam down point at the arranged time, we must leave here in 23 minutes." Spock glanced at the Doctor. "That is acceptable to you?"

"Fine." McCoy moved over to the Vulcan, reading the screen of the computer over his shoulder. As the information rolled past the only thing he caught with any accuracy was the heading 'Antirrhinum - genetic alteration for flexibility in adverse conditions'. Spock blanked the screen and moved over to the window. He stood, back to the room, while the doctor strained his memory to discover where he'd seen the word 'Antirrhinum' before.

"Snapdragons!" McCoy exclaimed. "You're growing snapdragons!"

Spock turned and regarded the excited medic calmly. His face remained impassive as he wondered what the Doctor would make of it.

"You old fraud!" McCoy grinned happily. "Why snapdragons? After all, they have no value, no use except ornamental. Come on, Spock, I won't tell anyone else you're turning into a botanist like Sulu."

The Vulcan said not a word, just let his eyes fix on a spot somewhere past the Doctor's left ear.

"And don't give me that tight-lipped Vulcan clam-mouth act!" McCoy stepped forward and tapped Spock's chest. "Give."

"It really is none of your concern what I do in my free time. If I choose to play noughts and crosses with the main computer or indulge in private research, unless I'm endangering the vessel or crew - " Spock switched his gaze to the irritating man - "it does not concern you." Not many Humans could stand to keep eye contact with Spock for long; something alien about the intensity of his dark bottomless stare made most people distinctively uncomfortable. Unluckily for Spock, McCoy had a lot of experience dealing with aggravated Vulcans. Taking a deep breath, McCoy stared back. He imagined his eyes were bulging; the strain made his eyeballs ache, "I'm just curious," he said. "I've never had you pegged as a horticulturist."

"As I said previously - " Spock's voice hardened almost imperceptibly - "it is not your concern." So saying he went over to the desk to retrieve his paperwork, folding the mysterious documents, and packed them into his holdall, shouldered the bag and picked up his box. "We should leave now, Dr. McCoy."

"Yeah, all right." McCoy still felt that he could get the truth out of his companion, if only he could find the right angle.

The walk back to the beam down point was accomplished in near silence. Spock was uncommunicative and McCoy had to save his breath for keeping pace with the Vulcan. It was still uncomfortably hot for him, and the doctor was relieved when he saw Ensigns Perez and Blake waiting for them.

Spock got out the communicator and informed the Transporter Room that they were ready to beam up.

As they energized onto the Enterprise, McCoy had another stab at Spock. "Well, thank you for the trip, Spock. I enjoy a good mystery."

"My pleasure, Doctor." Spock was as unruffled as ever.

Just then Captain Kirk bounced into the Transporter Room. "Hello, Chief." He nodded at Kyle, who was in charge of the transporter for this shift. "Well, Spock - " He regarded the Vulcan fondly. "Have a good trip?"

Spock glanced briefly at McCoy before replying, "Quite satisfactory, Captain." He exited the room with a nod to the others.

Kirk grinned at the Doctor. "How about you, did you enjoy yourself?"

"Hrmph." McCoy shook his head. "I still don't know what that dang-blasted Vulcan is up to!"

Still smiling, Kirk escorted the Doctor out of the Transporter Room and back to his quarters. He knew what Spock was doing, and he toyed with the idea of letting the Doctor in on the secret, but then again it wasn't his secret to tell, and Bones was big enough to take care of himself. Settling down with a glass of the Doctor's private stock of Saurian Brandy, Kirk soothed McCoy's ruffled feelings and soon had him off the subject. Finishing his drink, the Captain got up to leave. "Anyway, Bones, only another 3 months to go to the annual crew physicals." Kirk stretched massively. "You can get your own back on Spock then."

McCoy grinned evilly while planning his revenge on the errant Science Officer. "Yeah," he muttered, "I'll make his pointy eared head spin so fast his ears'll flap!"

Leaving the Doctor happily planning his revenge, Kirk made his way to Spock's quarters.

There he found the Vulcan carefully potting the fine seeds of the genetically altered antirrhinum samples into small pots filled with the red sandy soil of his home planet. "I take it you were successful?" Kirk asked, going over to watch.

"Yes, Captain." Spock finished the last of the samples. "This seed should flourish. My mother will be pleased with the results." Brushing soil off his fingers he turned, and a half smile lit up his sombre features.

*I still can't work out how he does that, thought Kirk. You can't see it, but he's smiling inside.*

Spock continued, "The plants should be ready to transplant to her garden in seven weeks... "

"Which is when we're due back on Vulcan," Kirk finished, "to pick up the diplomatic party we left off four weeks ago. Tell me, is it just coincidence that your mother's birthday just happens to be then?" He cocked his head and asked, "Or did you and Sarek cook it up between you?"

Spock looked faintly outraged at the suggestion of manipulating not only Starfleet but the Vulcan Embassy as well. "No, sir, I believe even that much forward thinking is beyond my powers; it is just... serendipity."

Kirk wasn't convinced, but still, who was he to complain if luck worked out in Spock's favour for once? *And good luck to him*, Kirk mused, thinking how much this difficult enigmatic being meant to him. He said his goodbye and left Spock to it.

When he was alone, Spock let a small satisfied smile form on his lips. These snapdragons would flourish on Vulcan, and his mother would be deeply happy and content with this reminder of the home she'd left behind; and if it just happened to be the anniversary of her birth, that was simply a coincidence - wasn't it?



## THE PROBE

I sent my message clearly, but still there's no reply.  
There was intelligence on this planet, now I must find out why  
My message goes unanswered from below that distant sky.

The Beings all are gone now, I'll have to plant new seeds.  
But first remove pollution, clear the land and all the seas.  
A pity the Wise Ones vanished, their message had to cease.

Wait - here comes an answer, but in such a simple form.  
These beings are much younger, only years since they were born.  
Still, I'll listen to their message. I shall not turn in scorn.

You tell me you're the only two who dwell here in this place?  
When first I came this world rang with the music of your race.  
The death of all the others is a dreadful thing to face.

You say the ones who did this were young and so unwise,  
But now they have grown older, and see through wiser eyes,  
And now you turn and ask me to spare their petty lives.

I'll spare them, and allow them to undo the harm they've done.  
Perhaps they've learned their lesson, true wisdom's finally come.  
Yes, let them be more careful, or they'll suffer when I return.

Helen Connor



# THE GUARDIAN

by

Sheryl Peterson.

"My Human is nervous."

The dark, hawk eyes brooded over the great chair beside which the figure had placed itself, as if by right, and scanned the head and shoulders of the man seated there. The smooth head of the watcher cocked alertly to one side, eyes taking in the subtle signs of increasing nervousness and irritation. *No fear, though*, the razor sharp mind added to itself calmly, approvingly. A deep wordless feeling burned in the great breast, which yet did not seem to breathe, so still was it.

The man in the chair fidgeted again, and made as if to turn to check that the other was there, but did not, for he needed not to see. He *felt* the presence. It was part of his being. Satisfied, he smiled, knowing there was no need to speak, relaxing imperceptibly, and the dark eyes behind blinked, softening at this acceptance, this silent acknowledgement of purpose and place. He was there with his Human. He would always be there, at his back to guard, at his side to protect. Where else *would* he be? Was the arrow ever far from the bow? Did the hawk wander from the glove which carried it without jesses or bondage? His was the choice and he had chosen. His place was here, beside this one, for all time.

"Damn, why don't they attack?" the seated figure growled, thumping his fist on the chair arm.

Behind him power, like an uncoiling spring, rippled through those sloping shoulders as if at some imagined danger to his chosen one. He looked so tiny in that huge chair, almost fragile. So many times only *he* had stood between his Human and death, standing over his body, his great strength slashing with the savagery only such times could unleash from that iron control of self. And afterwards, a word, a look that needed none, and it was enough. His Human was safe once more, and *his*, in a way no other *had* ever been or ever could be.

The dark eyes became hooded, turned inwards to dark caverns of thought, through which the other could not follow - though now and then, like a small boy exploring, he would try a few tentative steps to plumb the world of the other.

Minutes passed. The danger, which it now became obvious was no longer a danger, passed. The air cleared subtly. Warriors turned back into men. They smiled or gave thanks silently, whichever was their way, and went back to living. The guardian folded the wings he had stood ready to spread and was silent.

The figure in the chair snorted impatiently and the hazel eyes looked up and back to meet those behind. Amusement crinkled the corners and he joked, "How many decimal places did that one go to, Spock?"



The tall brooding figure of the First Officer stirred from his own private depths, and blinked like a sleepy bird of prey. "Elucidate, Captain. What decimal places? I was not engaged in mathematical computation."

Kirk grinned. Now the threat was over, he was suddenly playful. He put wonder into his voice. "Don't tell me you were daydreaming."

The Vulcan stiffened as if insulted, though perhaps just startled at the perception of 'his' Human. "I was thinking that we have both faced situations like this many times. Throughout the ages of your planet and mine, there have been instances where two strange forces face each other, not knowing whether the other will choose to attack or maintain silence."

Kirk smiled quizzically. "Funny you should say that. I was having a mental picture of myself, sitting here on this space-age throne, waiting to go to war and thinking that all I needed to look like some mediaeval Earth-type Emperor was a few tiger skins on the floor, and a few hunting leopards on each side to make it exotic." Spock raised an eyebrow, though Kirk couldn't tell if he was shocked or just puzzled.

"Oh, and of course, a hawk," he went on, grinning in pure mischief. He had a sudden mental picture of Spock with great wings on those sloping shoulders and was startled at how well they seemed to suit. Spock cocked his head consideringly. *The way a hawk does*, Kirk thought in surprise.

"A hawk, Captain?" he asked softly.

Kirk felt suddenly silly. Spock wouldn't understand his fantasy. "Yes - um - a hawk. Every warrior would have a hawk to sit on his wrist, and ride with him into battle. They're a bird of prey renowned on Earth for their speed and ferocity," he explained hastily.

Spock nodded, "I am aware of the nature of the bird, Captain. They ride upon the shoulders of their chosen Human and defend them against their enemies."

Kirk was surprised. Was there *anything* Spock didn't know?

"Yes, that's right. They hunted for them too," he laughed jokingly. "Must have been pretty handy to have, a bird like that. Yours to command as friend or weapon whenever the need arose."

The dark eyes of the Vulcan looked sharply into that eager face. Was there hurt or some other emotion there? The mask-like face hid it.

"You do not have need of such a bird, Captain. Even if it could tolerate the cramped spaces of a starship, as opposed to the skies where it could fly free, you would find it a boring companion. You could not converse with it, and its skills would be severely limited."

Before he could go on, Kirk stood up and touched his shoulder. The hazel eyes smiled into the troubled dark ones and Kirk thought, startled, *My God, Spock. I think I pricked a nerve there somewhere.* Aloud, he only said, softly, banteringly, "You sound almost jealous."

Spock stood very stiffly. "That is illogical, Captain! Jealousy is an emotion which..."

Kirk shook the stiff shoulder playfully, something Spock allowed no other person to do - ever. "It's all illogical anyway. For one thing I have no need of a hawk to ride on my glove."

Spock still looked stiffly ahead, sheathed in Vulcan control.

"I would not have one as a gift," Kirk went on softly, slyly; grinning when Spock's eyebrow rose and, despite himself, he turned.

"But, Captain, you just expressed a wish to possess one!"

Kirk smiled that famous smile that even Spock found irresistible, though he would die rather than admit it to anyone.

"Mr. Spock, you have missed the point," he said loudly. Then softly, so only Spock could hear, he added, "I already have a hawk to ride into battle with me. They only breed this particular type on Vulcan. They're one in a million," he finished, looking quizzically at Spock, wondering if the mask would slip and show his feelings.

It almost seemed to waver for a second, and the dark eyes warmed. Then the eyebrow rose in that unmatched arch. "Indeed?" he said coolly.

Kirk grinned. They understood each other. "And what's more, they play chess," he added in a normal tone for the benefit of the rest of the bridge. "Come on, Mr. Spock. Our watch is just about over. Shake your feathers and we'll have a game before dinner. Mr. Scott, you have the Con," he called, steering the Vulcan towards the turbolift.

"Captain, why should I wish to agitate the horny, epidermal outgrowth of a bird?" was the last thing Sulu heard Spock say. The whoosh of the lift door mingled with Kirk's laughter as they sped downwards.

Scott, happening to look up from the command chair just as it shut, could have sworn he saw Spock smile when he thought Kirk wasn't looking.

He turned back to the viewscreen. *That'd be the day, he thought incredulously, that I'd sign the pledge, and a damn sight more likely. Vulcans. Who could ever understand 'em? Come to that, who'd want to? He lapsed into reverie. Engines, now they were so much more friendly.*

## IDLE THOUGHT

Watched Star Trek last night,  
then went and cooked dinner.  
Kids screaming, food burning,  
of peace not a glimmer.  
Wish someone'd take me  
in a transporter shimmer!

Teresa Abbott

# CAPTAIN'S PETS

by

Fiona Crawford

The Captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise strode into the ship's main transporter room to a scene that might well have daunted a lesser man. Kirk took it in his stride, though something suspiciously like a twinkle lurked in those clear, soft hazel eyes as he took in his Vulcan First Officer's battle stance: arms behind his back, one sardonic eye-brow lifted, confronting his Chief Medical Officer, who, in his turn, was in his favourite argumentative pose - arms folded, chin out-thrust.

He wondered momentarily if he had made a mistake selecting these two for the preliminary scientific survey of Bazif IV. But no, McCoy needed a break from shipboard routine, however adamantly he denied it. He had missed his last two shore leaves due to freak accidents amongst the crew. And, from a Captain's point of view, both McCoy and Spock were in a class of their own for sheer ability and experience. He knew they'd do a first class job - unlike some surveys he'd read, not worth the computer memory they took up!

Now, if he could only get them down to the planet without further dispute...

Composing his features into stern lines as became a Captain unnecessarily delayed, he swung to face his First Officer.

"Explanation, Mr. Spock," he snapped out. "You were scheduled to beam down a full half hour ago."

"Twenty-four minutes and twenty-six seconds ago exactly, Captain," Spock politely corrected him, causing McCoy to lift his eyes to the heavens in supplication.

"Then why are you still here?" Kirk demanded, sharply. His eyes shifted to a small mountain of large lumpy sacks piled up against one wall, obstructing access to the transporter. "And what's all this?"

"That, Captain," replied Spock dryly, "is the cause of the delay. Dr. McCoy appears to think that we are equipping a small army for extended manoeuvres in the Antarctic, instead of two individuals for a brief stay in a temperate climate." He went on, even more dryly, "He even insists on including his bed!"

McCoy, thinking himself silent long enough, burst in at that. "Now you listen here, you pointy-eared son of a Vulcan, *you* might be practising ascetic rejoicing in sleeping on the hard earth with nothing but a ground sheet to lie on but - "

"A ground sheet is quite superfluous," interrupted Spock.

"But I ain't," McCoy stated bluntly. "At my age, I need at least a modicum of creature comforts."

Kirk, finding the Captain's stern pose too difficult to maintain for any prolonged period, gave it up. It never had any effect on those two anyway. He decided on a distraction instead.

"Bones, what have you got in here?" He poked into one of the sacks, pulling out a frying pan, a pressure cooker, a kettle, various cooking utensils and spotting an old fashioned camping stove right at the bottom.

McCoy took the articles away from him, putting them back and grumbling at him not to untidy things.

Kirk pointed to another bulging sack. "What's in that one?"

"Medical equipment."

"And that one?"

"Clothes."

"And that?"

"More medical equipment."

Kirk looked at all the other sacks, opened his mouth, then closed it again.

"Bones, you're only going for seven days and the Enterprise should be back in four," he protested weakly.

The tenderfooted woodsman flushed at the implied criticism. "Well now, Captain, sir, I'm finding all this unwarranted fault finding mighty hurtful."

"Bones, I wasn't... "

"You ordered me to go on this damn fool survey - I didn't want to - but you insisted. So I agreed, and put my best foot forward. Though when I think of all the scientists on board you could have chosen to accompany me and who I get landed with - not that I'd utter one word of complaint of course - "

Kirk choked and Spock's other eyebrow rose to join its companion.

"And lord knows I'm no camping enthusiast," McCoy continued to wax eloquent, the southern drawl becoming more pronounced, "but if a thing's goin' to be done it's agoin' to be done right. I'm going to have the proper equipment. Be prepared's my motto. And God knows I've sure needed to be when I think of all the scrapes you and Spock have got into and I've had to patch you up after - though, of course, I get no thanks for it... "

Realising that McCoy was rapidly talking himself into martyrdom, Kirk interrupted, "Dammit, Bones, you've got everything here bar the kitchen sink!"

"Correction, Captain. The good Doctor has included the kitchen sink." Spock held up a small wash unit.

Kirk's lips twitched. His hand went quickly to his mouth and, giving an unconvincing cough, he hurriedly turned, ostensibly to check the transporter controls. His eyes met the transporter

chief's over the console and he found his struggle for control undermined even further.

He hastily shifted his gaze back to Spock's sober countenance. Slowly, a wicked gleam entered his eyes that would have placed the Doctor immediately on his guard, if he had seen it. Kirk winked across at Spock, who gazed bemusedly back at him, and Kirk realised that the Vulcan had no idea how to respond to this Human gesture. He hastily turned back to McCoy before Spock could ask him what it meant.

"Bones, perhaps I made a mistake assigning you to this survey." He gave him his best apologetic smile. "You really don't have to go if you don't want to."

"I don't?" said McCoy, a smile beginning to beam across his face.

"No," said Kirk, hands behind his back as he faced him, adding innocently, "you know I'd be the last person to want to force anyone to do something against their will."

"Since when?" gasped McCoy.

Kirk ignored this and continued blithely, "I realise now that you'd be much happier staying on board and helping me with the new mission Starfleet Command just dumped - I mean *honoured* me with." He shot McCoy a quick look under his lashes and watched with secret enjoyment the play of emotions over the man's face, finally settling into one of outright suspicion.

"What mission?" McCoy demanded.

"Oh, ferrying diplomats to an interplanetary conference," Kirk replied insouciantly. "Of course I'll need you to assist me with the formal dinners. In fact - " he patted McCoy's arm - "it wouldn't be the same without that special brand of old Southern charm."

"That would be quite satisfactory, Captain," Spock chimed in approvingly. "The biologist Dr. Martin was the more logical choice - as I informed you earlier - and can now accompany me instead."

Kirk waited for the fireworks. They weren't long in coming.

"Well, it might be more satisfactory to you, Mr. Spock, but not for me it isn't," McCoy declared irately, wagging a finger at the Vulcan. "And as for your logical choices, I'll tell you what you can do with your logical choices... "

"Bones, Spock only meant... " Kirk began.

"I know what he meant," interrupted McCoy. "And whether he likes it or not... "

"Liking is an emotion, Doctor. I assure you I am incapable... "

"I'm going on this survey. I haven't gone to all this trouble getting everything ready to be told by this over-grown pixie that I'm not wanted!" He stumped up onto the transporter platform to emphasise his point. "Now if Spock would stop loitering and wastin' my time with his gratuitous arguments and get this here equipment

beamed down to the planet, maybe I could get some work done. Never known anyone so darned slow."

Kirk glanced wryly at his long suffering First Officer. But before either of them could start up again, he said cheerfully, "Well, that's settled then. You know I envy you both. Seven days on a lovely planet, temperate climate, exotic plants... "

"No one to talk to," said McCoy morosely.

"Think of it as a challenge, Bones," Kirk said persuasively. "A chance for you to get to know each other better." He smiled winningly and looked hopefully at his two friends.

The response was less than encouraging - Spock was glacial and McCoy sullen. Kirk pulled his ear dolefully and sighed. He headed towards the door, but turned as it swished open.

"Just one last order, gentlemen," he said.

"Yes, Captain?" they chorused.

"Behave yourselves," he grinned.

"Fat chance of doing anything else," McCoy yelled after him, "on a planet with no people."

The door swung shut. *Trust McCoy always to get the last word*, Kirk thought ruefully, as he headed back to the bridge.

McCoy sat back, face flushed with effort, and viewed his tent with simple pride. It had been an unholy struggle getting the danged thing up, but it was worth it. He glanced over at Spock's standard issue inflatable contraption and felt a sinful sense of superiority.

A shadow fell over his shoulder; Spock stood behind him, one eyebrow expressively raised.

"It's a tent, Spock," McCoy informed him smugly.

"Yes, Doctor, I am aware of the anachronism," Spock responded. "What I do not understand is why you have brought it on a scientific survey."

"Because I felt like it," snapped McCoy. "Because I wanted to build something with my own hands and not just press a button. Some people don't like having to rely all the time on high tech gadgetry. But of course a walking computer couldn't possibly understand these simple pleasures."

Spock touched the tent. It collapsed. "Perhaps not, Doctor. But I do understand why this particular model was discontinued." He strode off into the surrounding woodland, his eyes on his tricorder, leaving an outraged McCoy spluttering to find words pungent enough to hurl after his retreating back.

It took McCoy another three quarters of an hour to get the tent up - and have it stay up. By the end of it he was heartily sick of the whole business and would have given up long ago but for what Spock would have had to say about it. The Vulcan had a murderous

wit when he wanted, as McCoy, to his cost, knew only too well!

"Not that he'd think of offering to help. Oh, no! That would be illogical, I suppose. He just goes swanning off leaving me to do all the work!" McCoy grumbled to himself, straightening his back slowly to get the kink out of it and turning round to find the camp was fully set up. All their equipment was neatly laid out with careful precision and covered against inclement weather. Even a fire had been laid.

"Hmmmph!" snorted McCoy. "Well, he's got to be good for something," he mumbled, slightly mollified.

Suddenly, the heavens opened. Torrential rain splattered the ground, rapidly turning it into a mud bath. McCoy had never seen anything like it. He had been so busy with his tent that he hadn't even noticed how dark it had become.

He fled into his tent. "'Temperate climate', Jim said," he muttered to himself. "I'll give him temperate climates next time I have him in for a physical."

Five minutes later and a truly miserable McCoy discovered another fault with his by now hated anachronism. It leaked.

Taking out his communicator, he shook it dry, then flicked it open. A drop of water ran down his nose.

"Spock, you out there?"

"Of course, Doctor," replied Spock's unperturbed voice. "I have taken shelter and will return when the rain stops. Spock out."

McCoy smiled. So our First Officer doesn't like getting wet - just like a cat. Which was what the Vulcan frequently reminded him of. A great jungle cat, with all its tightly leashed power and feline grace; no way of telling what it might be thinking, but one knew instinctively that it would be dangerous to cross.

McCoy closed his communicator as another drop of water landed on his head. "What the hell," he muttered to himself. With Spock conveniently out of the way there was no reason to hesitate any longer. Promptly and without a second thought, he decanted himself into the First Officer's survival habitat. He told himself guiltily that he'd leave before Spock got back.

The hours passed and McCoy fell asleep. The rain finally stopped, the sun just peeping through the clouds at first, then suddenly blazing forth with new-found confidence.

Spock's silent return to camp found McCoy still in occupation of his quarters - and still asleep. He awoke with a start. Flustered, but determined not to show it, he said inanely, "So you're back already."

Apart from one eloquently raised eyebrow, Spock made no comment. He managed to make McCoy feel a fool just the same.

Spock changed quickly into dry clothing and settled down to write a report.

McCoy huffed and puffed for a while and was totally ignored.

"I could have been on the Enterprise," he said, finally. "I could have been sitting down to a lovely meal, good company, fine wines - " A light dawned. "Jim tricked me," he stated. "I've been had."

"Yes, Doctor," said Spock, agreeably.

McCoy could not be certain in the pale light but he rather thought he saw a twinkle in those fathomless black eyes. From that moment he decided that there was only one good thing about this mission - it couldn't get any worse!

The next day found them both hard at work, trying to make up for lost time caused by the dismal weather. By early evening however, McCoy decided it was time for a break, feeling well satisfied with the number of samples he'd been able to collect. *This planet sure is lush*, he thought, packing up his gear and starting to amble back towards the camp, clouds of pollen rising into the air behind him as he moved through the long grass. He was going to make sure that Jim spent at least a couple of days down here when the Enterprise got back. Lord knew, with the constant pressures of command, the man needed to take any breaks he could get, and you'd travel a long way to find a planet lovelier than this one.

He stopped for a moment to admire the view of the lake. Dark crystal clear water rippled with dancing sunlight and the reflections of the graceful lemon coloured trees growing on the banks, their long fronds dipping into the water as if trying to touch their own reflections. Behind, dark green forests led up to purple and blue tinted mountains. The sun falling on the horizon sketched a kaleidoscope of colours beyond imagination or the most gifted artist's paint-brush. Although the hour was advancing it was still hot, and the breeze was refreshing as well as fragrant with the scent of summer flowers.

McCoy found himself a rock and sat down to drink it all in, for the first time actually glad that Jim had ordered him to do the survey.

A small furry creature came out to feed on the tender grass shoots. It had the ears of a rabbit but the head, body and long slender legs of a roe deer. It seemed quite tame until McCoy moved and it fled in startled panic. McCoy thought sadly that its kind would be the first to find itself in trouble if man colonised the planet. As he would. The planet, at least so far, seemed ideal for it.

He sat for a while longer then, yawning, pushed himself up and headed back to camp, following the winding animal track.

Strolling round a bend, he suddenly stopped. In the middle of the track stood a large alloy cage and inside was his little furry friend.

For a moment he was puzzled, certain that he hadn't set any cages in this area, then quickly realised that Spock must be doing a study on the animal life too. Typical that the Vulcan hadn't bothered to tell him about it!

He saw with concern the increasingly desperate struggle for



freedom, the animal crashing frantically against the bars of the cage, and hurried over to release it.

"Poor thing. You're going to be dead by the time that fool Vulcan gets here."

The animal stared at him, eyes bulging, panting heavily, pressed hard against the back of the cage, its tongue hanging out the side of its mouth, its head seeming too heavy to hold up.

"Come on then, out you come," McCoy murmured encouragingly.

The poor creature seemed utterly petrified, and finally McCoy got half into the cage intending to drag it out.

Suddenly it dived towards him. McCoy got such a fright at the unexpectedness of it, he flung himself to the side, losing his grip on the gate as the animal darted past, racing free. McCoy grabbed for the gate but couldn't move quickly enough in the confined space. It clanged shut. McCoy was caught in his own trap!

The air turned blue as he struggled to get the gate open again from the inside. "This can't be happening to me!" McCoy declared out loud. "First that blasted tent. Now this! I've done nothing to deserve it! Nothing!"

Resting for a minute from his exertions, he decided, after a moments reflection, that although someone up there clearly had it in for ol' country doctors, at least he had been spared one final indignity: there was no pointy eared witness to his predicament!

The tasks he had set himself for the day accomplished, Spock sat down under a tree in the gathering dusk, intending a period of solitary meditation.

For a moment, however, he allowed the beauty of the planet, with all its vibrant colours, heady scents and the soft, sleep-inducing hum of insects, to distract him. It was so unlike the harsh desert world of his home planet.

He hoped the Captain would find time to visit. No-one would appreciate more the loveliness of the planet than that most Human of Humans. He, like the Captain, found it distressing to think that one day it might be destroyed by plough and saw.

He frowned. Ever critical of any emotional sentiment, he recognised the train of his thoughts as undesirable and raising an eyebrow at his lack of control, settled down to spend a little extra time in the disciplines.

Resting in the appropriate posture, he had achieved a light trance when a sharp pain in his side abruptly brought him back to full consciousness. Straightening slowly, he carefully felt the offending area before mentally making a few simple internal checks using the techniques of bio-control learnt by all Vulcans in early childhood.

"Most inconvenient," he murmured to himself after a moment.

He would have preferred to have been able to wait for the Enterprise's return before reporting himself sick, but his case was

too urgent. Reluctantly, he flicked open his communicator. However loath to place himself under the Doctor's care he was, logic gave him no alternative.

And, wryly, he admitted - at least in the privacy of his own thoughts - that if he had to trust himself to a healer, he would sooner have McCoy than any other, Vulcan or Human. Though at first highly dubious of a man so appallingly enslaved by his emotions, time and again Spock had come to observe the often remarkable results of the man's passionate caring - even for 'pointy-eared hobgoblins'. Spock had no quarrel with success. He could not deny that for the Human his emotions worked for him to help make him the dedicated and brilliant surgeon he was. He had slowly learned to accept their differences and even rejoice in them. But why those emotions - at such odds with his own Vulcan creed of non-emotion - should be so necessary to McCoy, Spock had never been able to understand. And usually, as now, he found he had not the time to consider the matter further.

The communicator burst into life. "McCoy here."

Spock looked down at the communicator. To his quick ears the Doctor sounded out of breath, but logically McCoy would tell him if something was wrong so he merely announced, "Doctor, there is a matter I must discuss with you."

"Oh, fine, Spock. I'll meet you back at camp."

"How long will you be?" Spock knew that he must receive attention quickly.

"How the hell do I know? I'm not a calculating machine," growled McCoy. Then more quietly, "Look, Spock, I'm a bit tied up at the moment. Just expect me when you see me."

Spock frowned in concentration for a moment, then, pleased for once to find that he recognised the Earth idiom 'to be tied up', i.e. to be engrossed in work, said mildly, "Your devotion to your duties is most commendable, Doctor," and continued, "however, you must not over-tax yourself. The Captain was of the opinion that you required 'to take things easy.' I shall join you in 5.2 minutes to assist you in finishing for the day. Spock out."

Spock closed his communicator and headed in the direction indicated by his tricorder. He could not be certain, but he thought he had heard the Doctor groan before the transmission ended. Was McCoy in truth hurt and for some illogical reason not informing him of the fact? He hurried forward, ignoring the increasingly painful stabs of fire shooting up his side, and arrived well ahead of his 5.2 minutes.

The Vulcan mask - almost - slipped. Both eyebrows shot up. The handsome, sardonic face quickly turned to stone. But inside, despite all of Vulcan's disciplines, he was laughing.

McCoy's sour look suggested he knew it. "Well, don't just stand there like a dummy! Get me out of here!" McCoy glared at him, daring him to utter one word.

Spock was undeterred. "With respect to dummies, Doctor," he remarked blandly, "I would be fascinated to learn how... "

"I knew it! I'm never going to live this down," McCoy wailed.

Spock moved to the front of the cage, crouching down to examine the catch. He glanced up and gave McCoy a look of well concealed affection. "Indeed. It should make a most entertaining story in the Officer's Lounge."

"Spock, you wouldn't!" said McCoy, half threatening, half pleading.

Suddenly, Spock stiffened. Grabbing the bars, he pulled the gate up using brute force to snap the jammed catch. His side screamed its protest.

"Out, Doctor! Quickly!"

The urgency in Spock's tone had the desired effect. McCoy moved almost without his own volition.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"The cage is not one of ours." Spock had scarcely finished the sentence when the planet dissolved around them.

They found themselves in a circular cage with glistening, transparent bars, suspended from a sparkling, frosted ceiling. Spock estimated a six foot drop to the ice-encrusted floor below. The air was bitterly cold.

"Fascinating!" he murmured.

The bars looked exactly like thin frozen pillars of ice. Gripping one of them, he tried his best to break it. The pain in his side forced him to desist sooner than he would have wished, the skin on the palms of his hands peeling off as he slowly loosened his hold. Giving himself a moment to recover, his eyes roamed with intense interest about the gigantic circular room beyond. In all his years in space he had examined a great many alien installations but he could find no ready frame of reference for the equipment and technology displayed before his inquisitive gaze. He tried to discover some logical pattern to explain the fluctuating lights, oddly shaped panels, bulbs, electric arcs, blue pulsating magnetic fields and curious suspended balls of silver matter that circled the glittering, ice-like walls of the room. He quickly realised that the technology he was seeing was far in advance of anything in the Federation or known Galaxy. His eyes gleamed with even greater fascination as he pulled the tricorder from his shoulder to see if it still worked.

To his surprise, it did. Odd that he had been allowed to keep it. Either their captors did not care what they found out about them, or the tricorder was so simple that the aliens did not consider it technology at all. Spock raised an eyebrow at this intriguing thought.

He sensed McCoy approach and stand by him. For once the Doctor seemed to be actually awed into silence. But not for long.

"Where the hell are we, Spock?" he whispered.

"The data is inconclusive," Spock replied, in a normal tone of

voice.

"Well, where do you think we are?" McCoy demanded, louder this time. "Looks like we're stuck in the middle of a glacier."

"I see no logic in random speculation," Spock replied, not looking up from his tricorder.

McCoy persisted, "At least tell me if we're still on the planet!" he demanded, irritated by the Vulcan's pedantry.

"That would be one possibility," Spock said, but looked non-committal.

McCoy suddenly took notice of the tricorder and realised he still had his medikit. "They didn't take our equipment!"

This time Spock did look up, one sardonic eyebrow raised at McCoy's unsurpassed ability to state the obvious.

McCoy cleared his throat. "Well, you must have found out something!" he blustered, red-faced, but trying to hide his embarrassment. *I ought to be used to being made to feel a complete fool by the Vulcan by now*, he thought, disgruntled. "Or is that tricorder just for show?"

"I believe we are on a vessel of some description," Spock advanced tentatively, reluctant to be rushed into unsound conclusions.

"But there's no engine sounds."

"For such advanced technology, it would hardly be a requirement."

A scratching noise attracted their attention and they turned in unison.

"Oh, migod!" gasped McCoy.

The Captain paced the upper bridge balcony; outwardly his expression was grim, but inside a cold hand clutched at his heart in icy fear. What could have happened to Spock and McCoy, the two best friends he had in the whole Galaxy?

They had been only one day out from Bazif IV when Starfleet Command had informed them that the diplomatic mission was cancelled and their services no longer required. Uncharitable thoughts towards the diplomatic service as time wasters had warred with a happy sensation of being let out of school early. Eagerly, he had looked forward to joining his friends on the planet for a few days; no worries, no problems, no command duties. Just what the doctor ordered!

He winced, but determinedly shoved his guilt to one side, at least for the moment. Later he might have to face it, come to terms with it, but he was a long way from giving them up for lost yet. He would find them! Somehow!

"Report, Mr. Chekov," he ordered, returning stiffly to the centre seat.

"Sensor scans can find no trace of them on the planet, Keptin," Chekov replied promptly. "We have found only their equipment. The landing party we sent down reports there is no sign of any disturbance or struggle at the camp. The inventory shows a phaser, two communicators, a medikit and a tricorder missing. They were probably wearing them. No reports of other wessels in this area and no remnants of ship's exhaust discharge around the planet." Deeply chagrined at his lack of success, Chekov finished reciting his unhelpful conclusions. He could not help but think that if Mr. Spock were here he would have found something, and had the lowering feeling that the Captain thought so too.

Kirk slammed a clenched fist against the arm of his command chair. "So you're telling me that they're not on the planet but there's no way they could have left it?"

"Yes, sir," said Chekov, miserably.

Kirk sighed, "Repeat sensor scans."

"Aye, Keptin." Chekov stifled a sigh. He'd already repeated the scans five times. He wondered what more he could do. An idea came to him - it wasn't much of an idea, granted, but at least it gave him something new to try.

An hour crept by. Kirk returned to pacing the upper balcony, then:

"Keptin, I have found a linear trace of exotic sub-atomic particles," announced Chekov, excitedly. "Usually only found near black holes. I used Mr. Spock's new experimental detector. It seems to vork!"

"I'm sure Mr. Spock will be delighted to hear that, Mr. Chekov," Kirk grinned. "Where does that trace lead?"

"To the next star system, sir. Complex Sivern."

"Information on that system?"

"None, Keptin. It is unexplored."

Kirk hesitated only a second. "Set course for it, Mr Sulu. Warp factor seven."

"But sir, ye canna be sure they're no still on the planet," protested Mr. Scott, at Engineering. "They could be trapped under ground wi' our sensors no being able to penetrate to them."

"I know, Scotty," said Kirk. "But I'm playing a hunch. Let's hope it's a good one."

"Aye, sir."

Kirk headed round the balcony back to his chair. "Well done, Mr. Chekov," he said softly, as he passed the science station.

Chekov's smile lit up like a beacon.

The alien stood over ten feet tall and to McCoy's eyes resembled a great lemon-coloured lobster. It had six leg-like

structures and six arm counterparts each ending in six tentacles, a hard carapace, several thick folds of flesh for a neck and a round bald head with two purple eyes stuck at the end of long waving stalks. He could see no obvious mouth, nose or ears. *Not the sort of thing I'd want to meet in a dark alley*, he thought grimly.

"Fascinating," murmured Spock with a distracted air, busy with his tricorder.

"Damn it, Spock, if you say that one more time..." McCoy burst out. "It may not have got through that thick Vulcan skull of yours yet, but for all we know that alien's keeping us here for a lunch-time snack, an hors-d'oeuvre. You stopped to consider that?"

"Calm yourself, Doctor," Spock said, in his usual dispassionate manner. "The chances that it intends to consume us are quite small. Ingesting alien meat, as you must know, is rarely wholesome and frequently leads to food poisoning. It is much more probable that it wants us for experimental purposes."

McCoy went a shade paler. "Thank you, Spock. You know just how to reassure people," he said, with icy sarcasm.

Spock glanced up from his tricorder, and almost apologised, realising that his response - although logical - had caused the Doctor alarm. He stopped himself quickly.

"You did not ask for reassurance, Doctor," he said coldly. "You asked for an appraisal of the facts."

The alien came over to the cage, which automatically lowered so that they were on eye-level, and stared in at them through its glassy stalked eyes. It blinked once or twice and made some humming sounds interspersed with sharp whistles.

Spock made the Vulcan salute, courteously introducing himself. There was no response. McCoy tried imitate it, whistling back at it, and ended up giving a wolf whistle.

Spock stiffened, but the alien merely turned away, busying itself with its equipment. *Control panels, perhaps*, Spock speculated. He watched what it did carefully.

"Well, what are we going to do?" McCoy asked. "We don't seem to be able to communicate with the thing."

"I am almost inclined to think that fortunate," said Spock, dryly.

The alien turned and clattered back towards them. Both stood stock still as two bars disappeared and one of the alien's gigantic fore-appendages, its tentacles waving like snakes, reached into the cage. Spock's eyes narrowed as he observed one of the alien's eye stalks fixed on him.

Suddenly McCoy stepped in front of him. He was grabbed with the appalling speed of a praying-mantis, the bars reappeared, and both McCoy and the alien vanished before Spock could do more than recognise the fear in McCoy's eyes.

Without wasting a second, even to curse McCoy's quixotry, Spock pulled out his phaser, concealed under his shirt. The last thing anyone should do was to fire a phaser aboard a spaceship; Spock was

willing to take the risk. He aimed carefully at one of the bars. The beam shot out then stopped as if cut off by an invisible wall about six inches from the phaser. Spock moved closer to the bar and tried again. The same thing happened. Whatever variation he tried, the beam was curtailed before it could hit anything. Even increasing power to maximum made no difference. He put the phaser away and resorted to testing each bar individually for any signs of weakness. But the only weakness he became increasingly aware of was his own. Despite using strips of cloth, torn from his tunic, to try and protect his hands from the savage cold of the icy bars, they quickly became raw and bloody, adding to the already intense pain in his side. Controlling the agony with all the disciplines at his command, he made one last effort to escape, using his tricorder to create different wave frequencies in the hope that one might have a disruptive effect on some of the ship's delicate circuitry. Nothing worked.

Finally, the crippling pain in his side took its toll and forced him to rest. He lay down, attempting a light healing trance, though fully aware that only surgery could help him. He felt nauseous and his brow was damp, not helpful in the dangerously cold conditions, the ambient temperature well below what a Vulcan would find tolerable. He began to shiver as his condition slowly worsened.

As he lay on his good side, Spock's eyes scanned the area outside the cage, trying once more to make sense of all he saw. Suddenly he focused on the area where the alien had been working before. A screen had appeared, and on it was Dr. McCoy walking along a narrow, bare grey corridor. He arrived at a junction. Spock watched as McCoy hesitated, muttering to himself, and then took the left corridor. It was a dead end. He retraced his steps only to find another junction.

Spock began to relax a little, unaware of how tense he had become. Logic had forced him to reflect on the possibility of vivisection when considering the fate of his colleague... and friend. But at least, for the moment, McCoy appeared to be in no immediate danger.

His concern soon returned, however, when McCoy sat down, refusing to go any further. After an hour, the scene suddenly changed. Other trials followed, with McCoy becoming more and more recalcitrant and in some cases downright obstructive and deliberately obtuse.

The hours passed, seeming interminable, then suddenly McCoy reappeared in the cage.

Spock raised himself on an elbow, suppressing his relief, and intending instead to give a caustic assessment of McCoy's performance, but the Doctor beat him to it.

"My God! Spock! You cold blooded slime lizard!" McCoy glared at him, enraged and shaking. "I could have been being dissected for all you knew, and all you could find to do was FALL ASLEEP!" he yelled at him, slamming a fist into his palm and rushing on furiously. "Why do I keep doing this to myself? Why do I keep wanting to believe that behind that stony Vulcan mask you really do have a few Human feelings..."

Spock lowered himself slowly back to the floor. He was feeling sick again but using all his strength of will to control it. He

waited patiently for the Doctor's rage to spend itself. Fortunately McCoy's tantrums never lasted long.

The torrent of words stopped abruptly. "Spock, you're sweating." It came out almost as an accusation. "What's wrong?"

"I believe I have the Vulcan equivalent of appendicitis," Spock explained calmly.

"Well, why in Hades didn't you say so?" exploded McCoy.

"I just did, Doctor."

McCoy knelt down and began to examine his patient. "Does that hurt?" He prodded the Vulcan's abdomen.

Spock said nothing - he was feeling too unwell and struggling too much to control it.

"Damn it, you pointy eared hobgoblin, if you don't let me know if you're in pain, I can't tell how bad it is." He looked up at him. "And you can take that martyr's look off your face. I haven't got my diagnostic table here so we're just going to have to do it the old fashioned way."

"Understood, Doctor. But I believe I can provide the information you require," Spock said, his breath short. "The appendix is near to bursting and will have to be operated on in the next thirty minutes."

McCoy noticed his medikit lying next to the Vulcan.

"What were you doing with that?" he asked. "Going to operate on yourself?"

"Affirmative."

"I wouldn't put it past you either," muttered McCoy. "Anything rather than ask me for help."

Spock blinked up at him. Was that hurt in his tone?

McCoy, meanwhile, had carefully tucked up the Vulcan's shirt and undershirt, exposing the minimum of flesh necessary to the freezing air. He made no comment about the torn and bleeding hands, knowing full well neither his sympathy nor his apologies would be acceptable to the Vulcan First Officer. He gave him an anaesthetic (not bothering to ask if he wanted it) and started sterilisation procedures - at least in so far as the primitive surroundings permitted - but here, at least, the cold worked in their favour. He then picked up a tiny laser from his kit, fitted a power pack and got to work.

Spock thought for a moment, hesitated, then - "Doctor, if you recall, when on the planet, I did say there was a matter I required to discuss with you."

McCoy stopped what he was doing. "This was what you wanted to talk to me about?"

Spock nodded.

McCoy glanced up, then hurriedly away, but not before the



Vulcan saw the quiet contentment that Spock had been willing to come to him for help.

McCoy grumbled at him, "Well, why wait till now, you damned fool. Do you know what would've happened if that had burst?" McCoy waved the removed appendix under his nose. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"I have no particular preference, Doctor," said Spock, a little faintly.

McCoy promptly tossed the appendix out of the cage and started rummaging in his medikit again.

Spock felt a moment's illogical indignation at this cavalier treatment of his organ, but was distracted from any protest when he saw McCoy begin to thread a needle.

"What is that for?" he inquired, a shade anxiously.

"To sew you up, of course," said McCoy, gleefully. "You don't think I carry protoplasmers around with me, do you?"

Spock watched his efforts critically for a while, then declared with cold disapproval, "Leonard, your stitches are squint."

McCoy looked up, indignant. "I'm suturing a wound, Spock, not sewing a sample for an embroidery competition!"

Spock gazed blandly back at him and for a moment McCoy wondered if he was being teased. He looked suspiciously at the Vulcan but could read nothing in the clever, saturnine face.

"I know what you're up to," said McCoy. "I've had patients like you before. Not quite in the same class, of course - for stubborn contrariness you're in a class all your own - but they think if they complain enough they'll get a discount on their bill. Well, you're out of luck, Spock. I'm chargin' you full rate."

Heavy lids fell over the black eyes to hide their amusement. Yet Spock wondered how long it would be before the true unpleasantness of their situation hit McCoy in all its entirety. Their teasing and quarrelling and sometimes downright bickering had distracted the man away from considering the situation fully until now. But sooner or later he would, and recognise that they were mere laboratory animals to this unknown being with whom they were unable to communicate, and who seemed unaware, or did not care, that they were sentient beings. There could be only one end to their predicament. The chances of help reaching them were vanishingly small, as were their chances of escape.

He wondered how best he could ease the burden for his friend over what time they had left.

McCoy, meanwhile, had finished his handiwork, applied a dressing, and began to help Spock rearrange his clothes. He then removed his own outer tunic and tried to help Spock on with it. Spock categorically refused to allow it. A fierce argument promptly ensued on who could best tolerate the cold, with McCoy finally winning a partial victory with the Vulcan agreeing to accept McCoy's tunic in exchange for his own torn one.

McCoy helped Spock on with his tunic before quickly pulling on

Spock's shirt, trying not to let him see he was shivering, and began to bandage the Vulcan's hands.

"Well, aren't you going to ask what happened to me?" McCoy demanded, still piqued at the Vulcan's strange lack of interest in where he'd been.

"I know what happened, Doctor." Spock pointed at the now dark screen. "I saw you."

"Oh!" said McCoy, and for a moment looked embarrassed. "Please, Spock, don't say it was fascinating."

"No, Doctor," Spock agreed quiescently. "It was, however, interesting."

McCoy sighed.

"You will have deduced that you were being put through certain simple intelligence tests?"

"Of course I did," said McCoy, crossly. "I've conducted the tests enough times myself."

"Then perhaps another time you should make more of an effort to be entertaining."

"I'm a Doctor, not a performing poodle!"

"What do you do with an animal that doesn't perform, Leonard?"

McCoy swallowed hard and refused to meet the gently mocking dark eyes.

"You'd better get some rest," he said, finally.

He looked around, wishing there was something he could use as a blanket for the Vulcan, knowing full well, whatever Spock protested to the contrary, that the cold was a serious danger to the Vulcan. Obviously the alien didn't believe in providing its specimens with any bedding materials. Even some straw would have been welcome.

McCoy tidied away his equipment, smothering a yawn. "How long have we been here, Spock?" he asked, not really interested but finding some comfort in just talking and needing something to say.

"Twenty-two hours and sixteen minutes."

No wonder he was so damned tired. "How time flies when you're having fun," he muttered.

He sat for awhile, staring at nothing, then, reluctantly, he too lay down on the hard smooth floor of the cage, curling up like a shrimp to conserve body heat while trying to find a comfortable position for himself, and quickly deciding that it wasn't possible.

Despite the appalling situation he found himself in, and his own considerable discomfort, a twinkle entered McCoy's eyes as a thought occurred to him. "Spock, what was it they said in the survival manual about conserving body heat?" he inquired innocently. "Wasn't there something about cuddling up together?"

There was a short silence. "The advantage of such a procedure

under these circumstances would be minimal," Spock said, his tone as icy as the ambient temperature.

"Well, I ain't enamoured with the idea either," McCoy retaliated. "But if you could contrive to change yourself into a Tau Cetian fawnbird....."

"I have a much more difficult request to make of you, Doctor," Spock interrupted.

"What's that?" McCoy asked, unwarily.

"Be silent."

McCoy sat up as if he'd been stung. He glared at the impervious Vulcan for a moment before deliberately turning his back on him.

Silence reigned for awhile, then: "Another day and Jim'll be looking for us," McCoy said sleepily.

Spock did not reply, knowing only too well that unless they were still orbiting Bazif IV, the Captain would have no idea where to look. All traces of the alien ship's presence would have long gone by the time the Enterprise got back from its mission.

"Well, won't he?" demanded McCoy.

"Are you asking for reassurance or an appraisal of the facts, Doctor?" Spock inquired.

McCoy snorted. "Jim's never let us down yet," he said, firmly.

"True, Doctor," agreed Spock. "But there is for everything a first time."

"Go put yourself into healing trance, Spock," said McCoy, carefully emphasising every word, "before I forget you're my patient and box those pointed ears!"

For a long time after that, nothing disturbed the peace of the vast room - except McCoy's snoring.

Spock, peculiarly sensitive to sound, found the noise harder to ignore even than the excruciating cold and pain in his side and hands, gradually increasing as the anaesthetic wore off. The harsh lighting only added to his distress. His preference for the dark was an idiosyncrasy well known to those few who had visited his quarters.

Suddenly Spock stiffened as he sensed a presence and turned his head to observe the giant alien staring in at them. He was intensely curious at its ability to appear and disappear at will without any obvious transporter effect. He got up slowly, intending to make another attempt at communication. He then noticed a bowl of green cubes and a dish of water that hadn't been there before.

Suddenly McCoy, whom he'd thought still asleep, stepped in front of him, face determined and more than a little grim.

The alien hummed and whistled, reached out an appendage and tickled McCoy's front with its tentacles. It then placed a collection of items, some shiny, some hard, some like rubber, in the

cage and as suddenly as it had arrived, it vanished.

With an exasperated glance, Spock stepped around McCoy's thin protective frame and picked up the objects, inspecting them curiously.

"Spock, you shouldn't be up," complained McCoy.

Spock ignored him, one eye-brow lifting. It seemed he would have to reassess his ideas on the alien's intentions - at least in part.

"Well, what are those stupid lookin' things?"

"I believe they are toys," said Spock, slowly.

"What!" exclaimed McCoy, aghast. "That refugee from a lobster pot thinks we're *pets*?"

"Indeed. At least preferable to being thought of as laboratory animals," Spock pointed out, logically.

"Great, Spock. Just great! If you're pleased about it, I'm pleased about it."

Spock wondered how the Doctor had gained the idea he was pleased about anything. Experience however decided him against asking McCoy for an explanation. He lay down again to rest, hoping that with McCoy awake he could now achieve a light healing trance. This time, however, he found McCoy's pacing distracted him. He watched, rigidly controlling his rising irritation, as the Doctor tasted one of the green cubes and hastily spat it out. In a fit of temper, McCoy threw the rest of the dish out of the cage, swiftly sending their toys to join it.

"Doctor, there is no logic in provoking the alien."

McCoy swung round to face him, "Why aren't you in a healing trance?" he demanded.

"I am trying," Spock replied, ironically.

"Well, try harder!"

For five minutes there was blissful silence and Spock was just about to slip from consciousness when McCoy piped up, "Spock, what the hell do we do for sanitation?"

Spock sighed. He rose on one elbow and looked pointedly at a litter tray placed discreetly in one corner of the cage; one of the few things McCoy hadn't tossed out. Seeing the Doctor's disgusted expression, Spock said dulcetly, "Perhaps you should have gone before we left."

For once, McCoy found himself at a loss for words.

"We are approaching the star system, Captain," announced Mr. Sulu at helm.

Kirk nodded. "Long range scan, Mr. Chekov."

There was a short silence, then, "Sir, I'm picking up a ship orbiting the fourth planet."

"Go to yellow alert. Shields up," Kirk ordered, as he crossed to the science station. "What about life signs on the planet?"

"It is class M. We're too far away to distinguish intelligent life forms."

"Very well," said Kirk. "Assume standard orbit, Mr. Sulu, but keep us behind that ship and above it. Chekov, sensor readings on the ship."

Kirk turned to Uhura.

"No contact has been made," reported Uhura, without having to be asked.

"Keptin, my sensor scans are being reflected back by the alien wessel. Composition of hull unknown."

Kirk's lips tightened. "Readings on the planet?"

"No intelligent life-forms indicated. Plant and animal life at quite low level on evolutionary scale."

"Then what's that ship doing there?"

"Perhaps a scientific survey like us?"

"They must know we're here by now," said Kirk. "Open hailing frequencies."

"Hailing frequencies open, Captain."

"This is James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise. We convey greetings and await your reply."

Silence.

Kirk bit his thumb nail in frustration. "This is the Starship Enterprise. Please respond."

"Something coming through now, sir," said Uhura. "I have the Universal Translator on line."

The forward viewscreen wavered and a very alien form took shape. A buzzing, whistling sound came over the speakers.

Kirk looked at the being, feeling that familiar quickening tug of excitement and delight he always felt when facing something new and particularly so when meeting an unknown sentient species. He spoke again, slowly and carefully, explaining who they were and emphasising the peacefulness of their mission.

He saw the alien operate a control panel with one long tentacle, "Most interesting, Captain," came a thin, reedy voice. "Yet your shields are up and your weapons armed."

"A defensive measure only, Captain..." If Kirk was hoping for a name he didn't get one. "We've lost two of our crew from a planet in a nearby star system. This makes us cautious."

"That also is interesting," replied the alien. "For I collected two specimens similar in shape and size to yourself - except their upper skins were blue not gold - from a nearby star system."

Kirk bit down hard on his anger at this casual admission of guilt. "Then I demand that that you return them immediately."

"Why?"

"Because they are sentient beings and you have no right to hold them captive."

"I observe no signs of intelligence."

Kirk's blood went cold. "What have you done to them?"

"I have conducted a few simple intelligence tests on one of the creatures. Nothing more. They have not been harmed."

Kirk leaned forward in his chair. "I insist that you return them to me."

"Why?" reiterated the alien.

"Because they're my crew," Kirk snapped.

"How can they be? They have not the necessary intelligence."

"Never mind that," said Kirk, waving his hand dismissively, realising that they were beginning to go round in circles. "I want them back."

"You seem most attached to them," the alien mused. "They are your pets?"

"They're my f... " Kirk quickly stopped himself from giving too much away. "Yes, they're my pets," he agreed.

"Your concern for them is most laudable." The alien hummed to itself for a moment. "What will you give to gain them back?"

Kirk's eyes narrowed. "What did you have in mind?"

"Yourself."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall keep your pets," replied the alien. "Though I fear they may not live long. They have eaten nothing in the last two days. Clearly they are pining for their master."

"All right, damn you," Kirk said, between clenched teeth. "What do you want me to do?"

"Transport to the planet below. The blue creatures will join you there."

The transmission ended.

Hardly had it done so before the Chief Engineer burst out, "Captain, ye canna do it."

"Give me an alternative, Scotty."

The Engineer took a deep breath, then slowly let it out again.

"We can fight, Keptin."

"Three very big objections to that, Mr. Chekov. One, Spock and McCoy are on board. Two, we don't know what technology we're up against, but from what we've seen it seems to be more advanced than our own. And three, I'm not going to be the first to open fire on a new sentient species. We've got to make it understand us better."

"Aye, sir, that's a' very well. But handing over a Starship Captain to yon alien beastie .... It's no right, sir," said Scott. "And ye know neither Spock nor McCoy would want ye to give yersel' up."

Kirk rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Scotty, can you rig up a portable transporter shield?"

Scott's expression quickly changed. "Aye, now that's more like it."

"I'll want you on the transporter, Scotty. As soon as McCoy and Spock appear, you beam them up here."

"But what about you, sir? You'll have to lower the shield to be beamed back aboard."

"Then it'll be a matter of who's quicker on the draw, you or our friend out there."

"Aye, sir," said Scott, grimly, "I'll get ye back all right. But that alien might not be too happy about it."

Kirk merely nodded, heading for the turbo-lift. "Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Be ready to warp out of here. And fast, Sulu, fast."

"Understood, sir."

"Spock, we've got to do something."

"I am open to suggestions, Doctor."

Their initial relief and delight at the sight of the Enterprise bearing down on them, viewed from one of the many huge crystalline screens, had quickly changed to concern and dismay as they and the alien heard the Captain's plan.

"You're in command, Spock," said McCoy. "You're supposed to be the brains of the outfit."

A few minutes later, they saw Kirk materialise onto a grey, fog-ridden planet. *Heaven knows what planet it is but it sure isn't Bazif IV*, thought McCoy. The very next instant and they too were on the planet.

"Jim! It's a trap! It knows what you're going to do." The words were hardly out of McCoy's mouth when the transporter beam caught them, whisking them away.

Kirk took a step forward - and found himself on what he assumed to be the bridge of the alien vessel.

"Welcome, Captain," the giant being greeted him from a console over to his right.

Kirk took a few steps towards it. "Our shields don't appear to be very effective," he said slowly.

"No, too primitive to be of much use," the alien agreed simply.

"Well, now that I'm here, what do you want?"

"Nothing, Captain. The test is completed. You are free to return to your ship."

Kirk could not hide his astonishment. "Test? A test of what?" he asked, his anger at the indignities inflicted on his friends beginning to fade and be replaced with burning curiosity.

"We believe that all life, whatever its degree, is precious. I was curious to know to what extent you shared that belief. Your reaction was most appealing. Perhaps my superiors will decide to attempt contact with your people, despite the low level of technology of your society." The alien went on, "A pity I have not more time to study your species. This curious dichotomy between the blues and golds is most interesting. I should like to learn why one evolved intelligence and the other not, but my schedule won't permit. I have the entire Magellanic Clouds, as you address them, to chart yet. My rest break is now over." The alien seemed to sigh.

Kirk grinned, beginning to like the alien and thinking it quite probably an unconscionable chatter-box. "You wanted a pet as a companion," he suggested intuitively.

"Yes, but your pets would not have been suitable, and I intended returning them to the planet I found them on." It went on to explain, "They are not well trained and threw everything - their food, their toys - out of their cage. You must spend a lot of time clearing up after them."

"Well, eh... " Kirk half choked at what his friends' reactions would be if they could hear this conversation. "Why are you so sure that the blues don't have intelligence? Did you try to talk to them?"

"No. What would have been the point? As I told you, I tested one of them. And then, there are the circumstances in which I found them. Clearly simple creatures. But I must also admit that, until I had seen you, I had not realised it possible that creatures with such a paucity of sound frequencies and pitch in their vocal range could have developed language, and such paucity of limbs and manipulative digits too!" The alien waved its full complement of arms and tentacles. "But I must delay no longer. Farewell, Captain."

"Wait. What were the circumstances... "

But already he was back on the bridge of the Enterprise. A babble of voices broke out as his crew eagerly crowded round, welcoming him back, asking questions, patting him on the back as if to make sure he was really there.



Only Spock stood aloof, as always, but there was a definite suspicion of quiet relief in his eyes at his Captain's safe return.

Later that day, Kirk walked into Sickbay to find Spock being mercilessly bullied by McCoy onto the diagnostic table.

"Spock, you either lie on that table of your own free will, or I'm gonna call Security and have you hog-tied so you have no choice, but either way, I'm goin' to give you a complete physical," McCoy stated irately. "Now, can we be adult about this or not?"

With a long-suffering look, Spock obediently lay down on the table.

"Bones, how is he?"

"I am quite functional, Captain."

"I'll be the judge of that," snapped McCoy, scrutinising his monitors. "Heart 214 beats per minute, blood pressure almost non-existent, internal body temperature 67oC. Hmmmph! All readings normal - in a manner of speaking."

Spock was off the table without waiting for the Doctor to swing it down for him.

"As I told you they would be."

"You'll still have to take it easy for a few days, Spock," McCoy growled. "You can't have your side cut open then walk around as if nothing has happened, even if you have got the constitution of a slime-devil."

"Good. Now that that's settled," said Kirk, "I'd like to see both of you in the Doctor's office."

Kirk lead the way, swinging round to face them as they trooped in behind him.

"All right, gentlemen. I want to know what you mean by your flagrant disobedience of orders!"

"Huh?" said McCoy, utterly bewildered.

"I ordered you both to stay out of trouble." Kirk paced in front of them. "And what do I find? You go swanning off with the first unattached alien that comes along."

"Now listen here, Captain, sir... " McCoy began, incensed, but Kirk ignored him.

"And why was that being so convinced that neither of you had an operational brain cell in your heads?"

"Captain," Spock stated, sardonically, "such was the outstanding quality of Dr. McCoy's witless performance - even I was convinced."

"That does it, Spock," McCoy burst out. "I'm confining you to sickbay for a week!"

"And another thing," said Kirk, too used to his friends' badinage to be distracted by it, "the alien spoke of the circumstances it found you in. Just what were those circumstances?"

"It didn't tell you?" McCoy asked, anxiously. Kirk shook his head.

McCoy and Spock exchanged glances. "Are you certain you wish to confine me for a week, Doctor?" Spock inquired mildly, but McCoy would have sworn there was sheer devilment in those dark eyes.

McCoy bit his inner lip and shifted from foot to foot, his eyes looking round his office as if searching for inspiration.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm waiting," Kirk said, hands behind his back, glancing hawk-like from one to the other.

"Well you're going to have a mighty long wait," McCoy told him, bluntly. "And furthermore, I find this high-handed, lordly attitude of yours entirely out of place, when what you ought to be doing is apologising."

"Apologising! For what?"

"Abjectly apologising, Captain, sir, for tricking me onto that danged survey of yours. You sold me a wonderful fairy-story all right; a few days in paradise, rest and relaxation you said. Poppycock! Too late I find out about the trifling little drawbacks you conveniently forgot to tell me about - like being lumped with Spock for a companion, like the uncomfortable nights of reversion to Boy Scouting, like being caught in a monsoon, like my tent leaking, like being stuck in a cage by an overgrown lobster that doesn't know a sentient being from a string bean. Little things like that!" McCoy railed. "Well the next time you have one of these things, Captain sir, let me tell you what you can go and do with it," McCoy paused for breath. "You can stuff it up your \_\_\_\_\_."

"Surely an anatomical impossibility," Spock remarked, giving the matter some thought.

Kirk's eyes twinkled, "Now, Bones, is that any way to speak to your m... " He hesitated and shot them both a wicked look.

"Our what?" demanded McCoy, ominously.

"Indeed?" inquired Spock, arms folded, one eyebrow raised.

"Why, your Captain, of course," said Kirk, teasingly, smothering a grin, the picture of boyish innocence. He hastily produced the bottle of Saurian brandy he'd been concealing behind his back. "Anyone care to join me?"

McCoy looked at Spock. "You think we ought to forgive him, Spock?" he asked.

Spock reflected. "Affirmative, Doctor," he decided. "With the provision, of course, that he promises not to repeat the offence."

"Good thinking, Spock."

"Can it, you two," Kirk said, taking three glasses from McCoy's cabinet and filling them. He shook his head. "If you both are going to start ganging up on me, I can see I'm going to be in big trouble."

"You bet your buns, Jim boy."

Kirk smiled and lifted his glass, but there was something in his eyes that could not be expressed in mere words. "Welcome home, my friends," he said softly.

Three glasses clinked merrily.

Kirk cleared his throat of a lump that seemed to have got stuck there, and then went on, the teasing tone back. "Now, Mr. Spock, you're going to tell me what really happened on the planet, aren't you?" he said, persuasively. "You know, the interesting bits that you somehow managed to leave out of your report. And I have read both your reports."

Spock gave McCoy a sideways glance, and for a fraction of a second a smile flickered around his lips.

"No, Captain," he said simply.

Kirk gave him a hurt, reproachful look.

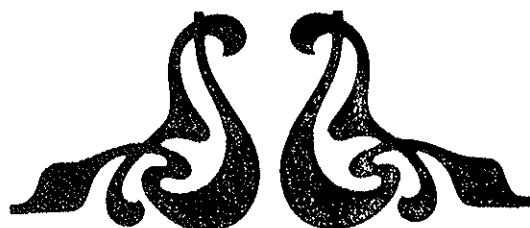
McCoy sipped his brandy. "Spock - about that medical bill," he said, carefully not looking at him. "I've decided I'm goin' to give you a discount after all," he announced, generously.



A God has come among us to save us at this time,  
But I hold him even dearer, for he's said that he'll be mine.  
I love him oh so dearly, I want him close to me.  
To others he is wondrous, but his Human side I see.

Since he stepped out from the temple I hoped to be his wife,  
And now that he's my husband I live a joyful life.  
Oh Kirok, never leave me, never say you have to go,  
For I, your wife Miramanee, really love you so.

Helen Connor



# THE ABSENT FRIEND

by

Maggy Edwards

## A Dark Conspiracy

The room was dark, shrouded in shadows thrown by the blinking lights of instruments. Krath, brutal-looking even for a Klingon, smashed his fist down so hard onto the table that everything on it jumped.

"Bah! I asked for results, not your excuses. Do you hear? Results!"

"Yes, Master, but..." Konith stopped, uncertain how to continue without risking more anger. As it was his problem was solved by the timely arrival of a sergeant.

Kllont approached and bowed his head in respect. "Master, we have just left home space."

"Get out!" was the reply, spat in anger.

Kllont bowed low, and backed away into the darkness. Krath began to pace back and forth.

"Our ambassador reports that his every move is blocked by that damn Vulcan. He is popular, and has turned many against us. This will end! The Empire demands it! Our progress will always be resisted, and the element of surprise is weakened by his warnings. He must be silenced. Do you hear?"

"We have tried, Master, but he is always well guarded."

"You fool! I do not require his death. They will just replace him with another, and another, who will do the same - perhaps even better. No, we need to find a way to... control him, break his will... turn him into a tool for the Glorious Empire."

"He will never betray Vulcan, and they are pledged to support the Federation," commented Konith.

Krath sighed. Where did the Empire get these warriors from? All courage and strength, but no brains; this was why the long-planned conquest of Federation space was proving so hard.

The Federation of Planets consisted of many worlds, but Terra and Vulcan combined had proved an unbeatable combination. The other worlds provided manpower, but as a Klingon he dismissed them as unimportant; in battle Klingons would squash them like flies. But the giant Starships, manned mainly by damned Humans - so unpredictable - and helped by those cold Vulcans who ran things in diplomatic circles with their logic, were proving a major problem, one he must solve.

He stopped his pacing and stood, tall and silent, for several

moments before an expression of evil pleasure lit his face. "I have it! Does this Vulcan have a weakness?"

"Pardon, my lord?"

"A weakness, you fool. Perhaps he is in debt? Likes to visit the pleasure planets? A weakness!"

"I do not know."

"Well find out! Don't return without something, on pain of your miserable life. Now get out - you have my orders to come up with something we can use against him."

Konith bowed low, trying to hide the tremor in his voice. "As you command." He backed out of the room, very relieved to get out in one piece - the last officer to report failure of a mission had been carried out several pieces at a time. He rushed away to find out what he could about Sarek, the Vulcan Ambassador to the Federation.

It did not take him long, for Sarek had been a thorn in Klingon flesh for years, and as such was recorded in their files, but Konith moaned in despair, for as he had suspected Sarek was - like most Vulcans - uninterested in such pleasures as women, gambling, and gratification of the flesh.

How could he report back? It would mean death. There seemed to be nothing they could use against Sarek. He paged through the information again and again. Nothing!

He knew he dare delay no longer. It was time to report back. Well, he would try to face death bravely, like a true warrior, but to be killed by another Klingon was a disgrace. He had always hoped to die bravely in battle, not because of an unsuccessful report. He has heard of Krath's brutal tactics, and had always admired them - until now.

Konith entered Krath's cabin and stood silent, hoping that his fear was well hidden. It was, until Krath came to stand only inches from him, gazing with cold eyes into his face as though reading his very soul.

"Well?"

"Master..."

"Well?"

"I am sorry to report that... I have found nothing."

"Oh, you *will* be sorry, Konith," Krath said in a low whisper. Then, "There must be something we can use. Tell me what you do know."

Konith stammered, "He is a true Vulcan, and follows the teaching of their logic as expressed in IDIC. He graduated from the Vulcan Science Academy, and entered the diplomatic service. He is from a high-born family... I believe there is a blood-tie to T'Pau."

"There is something, you see. We progress. T'Pau is powerful on Vulcan's Council. If we can get to Sarek we may be able to control her. Continue."

"There is nothing else, Master."

"Fool! There must be. Tell me everything. Everything!"

"He is bonded to a Human woman, Grayson. I thought that might have been of use, but she has been accepted into Vulcan society. She now teaches their offspring Earth's tongue. Her character is unblemished."

"More."

Konith thought hard. "Sarek has denied reports of ill health."

"What do you know of it?"

"Very little. It seems he has consulted a Healer several times, the first time during an important conference on Catulla."

"On Catulla?"

"Yes. Rumours were that it was a reaction to his son's rebellion."

"A son? An only child?"

"Yes, Master."

"But I thought he was bonded to a Terran. Was this the son of a previous bonding, then?"

"No, he was the result of careful Vulcan/Terran experimentation conception. He is the only surviving hybrid."

"This son - what form did his rebellion take?"

Konith saw a chance for his survival. "He joined the Federation's Starfleet."

"So, the spawn of the Vulcan is aboard a Federation Starship, and opposes us, as does his father?"

"Yes, Master. He is a Science Officer, I believe."

"I might have guessed. Which ship?"

Konith hesitated, afraid to speak, knowing what his answer would provoke.

"Which ship?"

"The Enterprise."

"Kirk's ship?"

"Yes, Master."

"This son - what is his name?"

"Spock."

"S-P-O-C-K..." Krath repeated slowly. "And this Spock - is he valued by Sarek?"

"I believe not. The Ambassador has made it known that there is a rift between them. He will not even have his son's name mentioned in his presence."

"And the mother - what of her?"

"I do not know, but being a Human she would be emotionally attached to her offspring. He is an interbreed, however, so perhaps the feeling is absent. I do not know what she feels for him."

Krath sensed victory closer now. "I suspect that the father is fond of his son."

"Why so, Master?"

"Because it would be a rare thing for a Vulcan to agree to undergo sexual experimentation. They keep their mating practices a secret. To let Terran scientists work with them to produce the child would not be an easy decision for Sarek. It took courage to risk becoming a specimen; the result is this halfbreed, an only son. No, Sarek must value him, even if his stupid logic prevents him from acknowledging the fact."

"But the son has rebelled, shamed him," Konith protested.

"Rebelled, yes; shamed, no. For a halfbreed to overcome all the Human prejudices and reach officer status is a rare thing. I know of this Captain Kirk." The name was said with hatred. "He is no fool. He would not have the Vulcan on the Enterprise unless he was valuable to the ship, for Kirk is a true warrior, and no-one on that ship is inefficient. Kirk picks his crew carefully. I think we may have a way to Sarek."

"We do?" Konith wasn't convinced.

"I agree, we have very little to use, but this son may be the answer. If not, at least we will be free of a Starfleet scientist. I shall enjoy depriving Kirk of an officer. If all goes well, perhaps I can ensnare Kirk also." Krath paced up and down the dim cabin, gathering his thoughts. Then, "Yes, leave me. I will give this more thought and decided the best way to proceed to ensure that this time the Empire does not fail. Get out. Send in Kllont."

"As you command." Konith couldn't believe he was still alive. He thanked his gods.

Krath ordered Kllont to begin monitoring the whereabouts of the Enterprise and of Sarek, with regular reports to him alone, on pain of death.

For a considerable time the Enterprise was in far space, according to sub-space messages intercepted by Klingon ships. She was engaged in star mapping and delivering medical supplies to outlying Federation bases.

Krath used this time to plan how best to outwit Kirk. He knew that the biggest threat to his plans would be the Enterprise. Sarek was no problem. Vulcans had long ago lost their love of violence, and would not retaliate even when seriously provoked. No, they relied on the Terrans to do that for them.

Krath smirked. Kirk... Yes, he would look forward to hurting him, and now he knew how, for Kirk too had a weakness - he too valued the Vulcan Spock. At first Krath had thought that it was only as a good officer, but careful investigations had unearthed a strong friendship between the Captain and Science Officer of the Enterprise. If Krath was right, one act would effectively tie the hands not just of Sarek but of Kirk too, and without any loss to the Empire. But first he must pave the way carefully, lay the trap.

How to do so was to prove easier than he had ever envisaged, thanks to a damaged cooling rod.

### Voyaging Through Strange Seas

The Starship Enterprise glided slowly through the dark, silent Severan sector.

Lt. Severan was standing proudly on the bridge beside her Captain, watching the silver stars pass by. To have this beautiful place named after her was a great honour, but as her Commander had calmly stated, it had to have a name, and hers was as good as any.

She smiled to herself as she thought of the reception she would receive on returning home. Since joining Starfleet her career had been undistinguished; that was, until she was posted to the Science Section at the personal request of Mr. Spock. It had opened up such a wide opportunity to use her talents to the best of her ability, and Commander Spock had made sure she was stretched to her limits. He had seemed to sense the potential in her that no-one else had.

Mr. Spock was demanding, but always it was tempered by immaculate politeness and understanding. She knew that all the science team admired him. He had a superior mind. She had often seen him calculate faster than the computers, and still be able to hold a conversation while doing so. He had explained that all Vulcans had the ability, as though it was nothing to wonder at. What a place Vulcan must be, with a whole population like Spock.

Her thoughts came to an abrupt end as the Captain's voice broke the silence. "Well, Lieutenant, what do you think of your namesake?"

"Beautiful, sir."

Captain Kirk grinned in his boyish way. "You know, after all the hundreds of star systems I've seen, I still think that too. Well, you've worked hard and proved Spock's faith in you. I don't think I'll be breaking any confidences if I tell you that Mr. Spock is recommending promotion, but perhaps it would be better to wait until you hear officially before mentioning it to anyone else - including Spock."

"Right. Thank you, sir." She tried to hide her smile and failed.

"Off you go, Mister, back to the labs, or the Commander will be up to see why I'm delaying you."

Severan nodded and took the turbolift to the science labs on G Deck. As she entered the main lab she nearly collided with Mr. Spock.



"Ah, Lieutenant, I was just about to summon you. I trust you have had sufficient time to observe your sector?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"Thanks are not necessary, Lieutenant. Just continue with the monitoring and ensure that your records are legible even to the most illiterate of the crew." He turned at the sound of the automatic door. "Doctor McCoy, I was just talking about you."

Severan grinned. Spock looked down at her, and there was a definite twinkle in his dark eyes, although his face remained as blank as always.

McCoy glared at them both. "I suppose you won't share the joke?"

"Vulcans are incapable of joking, Doctor," Spock said calmly, and signalled to Severan to get back to her work.

McCoy poked a finger at the Science Officer, but carefully avoided actual contact. "Spock, you know why I'm here. You've been deliberately avoiding me."

"I, Doctor?" Spock asked.

"Yes, you, Mister! I've had the results of that blood test back from the lab for days, and I'm sure it'll come as no surprise to you that they're not normal."

Spock sighed. "Doctor McCoy, you are well aware that my results will differ from those of the rest of the crew."

"Of course I know that, you stupid idiot! What I'm saying is..."

Spock calmly took McCoy's elbow and steered him towards the door. "Doctor, as you can see by the braid on my sleeve, I am an officer, and I would like to remind you that regulations governing medical reports clearly state that they are confidential to you, the crew member concerned, and the Captain if necessary, not for general consumption by the entire crew. Therefore please lower your voice and I will accompany you to your office, where we will be able to discuss the findings reasonably quietly."

McCoy swore under his breath. "Well then, why didn't you just come there in the first place, you green-skinned idiot?"

Spock, if he heard, ignored McCoy's outburst, but as they left the lab he said, "I would have attended Sickbay as soon as my workload allowed, Doctor."

"I just bet you would - maybe in twelve years or so. Look, Spock, I'm sorry I lost my temper back there."

Spock looked at the Doctor with patience. "Doctor, it is not your fault entirely. Please understand, whereas I use logical thinking, Humans let their uncontrolled emotions rule their mind processes."

McCoy was trying to think of something to retaliate with when Kirk stepped out of the turbolift looking concerned.

"I got your message, Bones. What's all this about Spock's blood test?"

Spock turned to McCoy, and in a cold voice asked, "Doctor, was it really necessary to inform the Captain?"

McCoy became very serious. "Yes, Spock, it was. Now will you both come to my office and I will explain. That, gentlemen, is not a request; it is, I'm afraid, an order from your Chief Medical Officer."

Kirk glanced at Spock as they followed the Doctor, and noted that the Vulcan had turned paler.

Nurse Chapel was applying a new dressing to a yeoman's arm when McCoy hurried past her to his office, followed by the Captain with Spock trailing some way behind. Chapel's face turned a bright pink as Spock brushed past her, and she stopped work until he had quietly closed McCoy's office door behind him.

The yeoman hadn't failed to notice her reaction to Spock's arrival, and said with a grin, "Nurse, I sure wish I could cause a stir like that just by crossing a room."

Chapel snapped, "I really don't know what you are talking about Yeoman!" But he noticed that her eyes didn't leave the closed office door.

McCoy sank into his chair and indicated for Kirk and Spock to sit too. Kirk pulled a chair from against the wall and sat facing the Doctor. Spock remained standing, his hands clenched behind his back.

"Well?" Kirk said. "Spit it out, Bones - what's so worrying?"

McCoy swallowed hard. "I believe Spock is in the early stages of developing stropic anaemia, and there's not much I can do about it."

Kirk looked up at Spock, who appeared to be unmoved by the Doctor's words. He then turned back to McCoy. "Strop what?"

"Stropic anaemia, Jim. It's a rare thing. I've had to search hard to find out much about it. I'm not even sure yet if it will develop into anything that will cause Spock serious problems. I did say he's in the early stages, and it could well stay that way. Might even disappear altogether. I just don't know."

"Well tell us what you do know!" Kirk sounded rattled.

"As far as I can make out, it's caused by a complicated reaction to phiminol. Now before you interrupt, I know phiminol isn't dangerous to us, but Vulcans can have a bad reaction to exposure, and Spock must have contacted it directly. I can only think it was most probably when there was that accident with the cooling rods about three months ago."

"Good god, Bones, the stuff is used in most Starships. If it's that dangerous it should be replaced with eminol, or even simpan; they could both do the job just as well."

"Jim." Spock sounded his usual calm self. "Those chemicals are both expensive. Why replace a cheap, easily available substance

for the sake of a small number of Vulcans serving aboard the dozen Starships? It would not be logical."

"Stuff logic!" McCoy muttered.

Kirk stood and began to pace the small office. "Bones, say this anaemia does develop into the full disease. What will that mean to Spock? How will it affect him?"

"I'm not at all sure, because of the Human factors in his blood, but I should say that the least he could expect would be extreme tiredness, dizzy spells, headaches... and blindness." McCoy paused for several seconds before continuing, "Then coma and death."

Kirk sank back down into his chair, stunned. "You mean he'll die?"

"Yes, if it develops past this stage. I can't do much about it, but I must keep emphasising that it may never get that far, and in the meantime I'll keep researching for something that will help."

Spock, still pale, moved towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Kirk, concern for his friend in his voice.

"I am due on the bridge, Captain. I believe the Doctor no longer needs me here... do you, Doctor?" Spock sounded as though it was a normal state of affairs they had been discussing, and he had better things to be getting on with.

"Er.. no, Spock, no," McCoy stuttered, shaken by Spock's lack of concern at a probable death sentence.

Kirk almost shouted, "McCoy?"

"Well, he's right, Jim; perhaps it is better to try to carry on as normal."

"I agree, Jim. I am perfectly all right," Spock said. "With your permission, I will continue my duties."

"Very well, Mr Spock." Kirk couldn't think of anything else to say.

When his First Officer had left he turned to McCoy, who was busy hunting in a desk drawer for two glasses. Kirk noticed the unusual tremor of the Doctor's hands.

"McCoy, what are the chances of this thing...?"

The Doctor shook his head. "I really can't guess, Jim. It's out of my league. I'm just a glorified country doctor." He sounded bitter. "I'd like Spock to see a friend of mine, a specialist in blood diseases. When is our next planetfall?"

"Starbase 7, in..." Kirk looked at the chronometer "... approximately twenty-eight hours."

"Well this fellow, if I contacted him, could meet us there; that is, if you could hold back departure to give him enough time. He's on Starbase 5."

"Of course. Look, I'll see Uhura now and fix it. What's this man's name?"

"You need Dr. Stanley Phillips. He's a good man, Jim; if anyone can tell us about Spock's chances of beating this thing, he can."

Kirk nodded, took the offered brandy, and uncharacteristically sank the lot in one gulp. "After fixing a meeting with Phillips I'm going to make sure that all phiminol is off Federation ships, cost or no cost."

McCoy hadn't touched his drink. He was deep in thought. "You know, the fact that Spock is a hybrid, and the only one of his type, is going to make matters more difficult. I think I'll try to contact the genetics experts involved in his birth to see if they can help. I hope all this proves to be worry over nothing, but I want to be prepared for the worst."

Kirk nodded. He was only half listening. All he could think about was what it would be like without Spock around. He didn't like it.

"Good man. We've dealt with worse before. We'll come through this. Now I'll get on to this Dr. Phillips right away." He spoke with a confidence he certainly didn't feel.

### Together and Apart

Kllont almost ran as he tried to catch up with the large figure marching down the corridor in front of him. Panting, he overtook his commanding officer and blocked his way.

Krath snarled, "I hope you have a very good reason for delaying me, or you will pay dearly."

"Yes, Master. I have news for your ears only," Kllont gasped. He looked around, then said in a lower voice, "About the Federation Starship and its crew..."

"Enough! In here." Krath moved into an empty cabin, dragging Kllont after him the the scruff of his neck. "Now, what news?"

"Master, I did as you commanded and intercepted all communications to and from the Enterprise. There was a message that I think will be of interest to you."

"Stupid dog! Get to the facts."

"The Captain has requested a Healer known as..." He rummaged in his tunic and found a message slate; referring to it he continued, "... known as Phillips, to meet the ship at their Starbase 7."

"Why?"

"It was at the recommendation of their own Healer, McCoy. There is a case of... stropic anaemia in the crew." He stumbled over the unfamiliar words.

"So, why is this so important? It could have been put in your

daily report. Fool! Why bother me with it? I am busy."

Kllont stood his ground and did not flinch in the face of such anger. "Because, my lord, that type of anaemia affects only Vulcans - and the only Vulcan on that ship is..."

"Spock!" Krath spat out the name.

"Yes, Master. The son of Sarek."

"Interesting." Krath pulled a small leather bag from his belt and tossed it to Kllont. "Here, good work. There will be more, if you can tell me when and where this Healer and the Vulcan are to meet on the base."

"Yours to command, Lord." Kllont bowed low.

Krath let a wicked smile cross his face. It was all beginning to come together, just as he had hoped it would. Soon Sarek would be his pawn, a puppet in the hands of the Glorious Empire, and another voice he could command in the Council of the Federation. Then he would be able to ensure that the Starships such as the Enterprise were stopped from active duty against his troops, and the invasion could begin in earnest. But first things first. Healer Phillips...

Doctor Phillips was in a hot lecture room trying to explain to a group of students the importance of regular self-testing while dealing with some of the deadlier strains of Bulan Fever. He sighed, wishing that he had a talent for public speaking, but try as he might, he always sounded boring. He knew it, his students knew it, the training college administrator knew it.

But as if to compensate for that failing he was gifted with a brilliant brain, and had been able to come up with cures for some of the rarest diseases. These students were probably not enjoying the lecture, but he knew they would gain vast benefit from it and from the papers he had issued on the topic, copies of which he planned to ask the Federation to include in all future memory banks of their ships.

He noted the time, and with badly disguised pleasure announced the end of the lecture. His announcement was met by the sound of scraping chairs and the general hubbub of chattering students as there was a rush for the exits.

Dr. Phillips had about an hour before he was due to catch the shuttle to Starbase 7. Dr. McCoy was an old friend, and when the message had come through he had welcomed the chance to see him again. It must be five or six years since they had last met, and a case of stropic anaemia would be an interesting challenge; he didn't come across that very often.

There was just enough time to rush home and say goodbye to his son before ordering an air taxi to the shuttle port.

Phillips thought it a little strange to arrive home and find the security lock disengaged, but his son had probably forgotten to secure it; after all, boys of sixteen had more pressing things to think about, and Rupert had been spending most of his free time with the pretty girl who lived next door.

However, as the Doctor entered the apartment he realised something was wrong. The sparse furniture was in disarray, and blood was splashed on the wall.

"Rupert!" he shouted.

The word died in his throat as he heard a sound behind him. Blackness engulfed him, and he was unconscious before he hit the floor.

McCoy and Kirk waited outside Spock's cabin.

"He'll be awkward, Jim. I tell you, he will. He can't help it. He'll make some excuse. He's a stubborn, self-willed..." Words failed him.

"Oh, come on, Bones. Spock is just a bit proud. It's the way Vulcans are. He's been alone too long, not used to anyone else taking an interest in what happens to him, that's all. He'll co-operate if we use a logical argument. He can't resist logic."

"You think so?" McCoy sneered.

At that moment the cabin door slid open to reveal Spock, looking calm and relaxed after his meditation period. "Captain, Doctor," he greeted them.

"Now look here, Spock..." McCoy began, but Kirk interrupted him before the Doctor could get into full flow.

"Spock, we're docking in ten minutes. Are you ready to go with Bones to see this friend of his?" Kirk saw no point in beating about the bush.

McCoy was rocking on his heels, hands behind his back in a Spock-like pose, with a look of eager anticipation for the argument he expected to follow Kirk's question.

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow and said mildly, "Of course, Captain."

This took the bluster out of McCoy, and left him feeling deflated.

Kirk knew that the Doctor was looking forward to bandying words with Spock, and suspected that the Vulcan had agreed so easily just to provoke him.

"Good. Right, Doctor, I'll expect you both back on board in twenty-four hours. If you intend to stay any longer, call in. Good luck, gentlemen."

He wanted to say more to his friend, much more, but did not want to embarrass the proud Vulcan. It was with mixed feelings that he watched them dissolve into sparkles and vanish from the transporter pads on their way to reform on the base seconds later.

McCoy took Spock by the elbow. The Vulcan tried to pull away from his grasp, but the Doctor held on like a limpet.

"Oh no you don't. I know you keep saying you hate to be touched, but no way are you slipping away from me till we've seen Phillips."

Spock looked hurt. "Doctor, I assure you I have no such intention."

"Yeah, I bet," said McCoy. "Well okay, I put you on trust to keep close to me."

"As you wish, Doctor. I promise to accompany you to see the Doctor, and I will keep that promise. After all, Vulcans..."

"Can't lie. I know," finished McCoy, but it did not stop him racking his brains to find a loophole. He was convinced that the Vulcan had thought of some clever way of getting around the promise. He had always had a fear of sickbay. McCoy guessed that Spock didn't like to be seen as needing help from a mere Human, but then again as his birth had been so unusual he must have been scrutinised by enough medical men in his early life to be fed up with the thought of another.

McCoy had noticed that the Science Officer had been very quiet since the results of the blood test were known, and had kept to himself in his off-duty hours. Perhaps he was as worried as Jim and himself, McCoy reasoned; it was hard to know, because Vulcans never showed their feelings. Jim swore he had seen Spock smile once, but McCoy didn't believe it.

They made their way from the transporter building out into the main complex. It was teeming with crews on shore leave, many in Federation uniform, or that of the merchant fleet.

"This way." McCoy pulled at Spock's sleeve.

"No, Doctor, I think you are confused. It is this way," Spock said quietly.

"No, Spock, you're wrong. Phillips definitely said he would meet us at the Galaxy Hotel."

"In that case, Doctor, it is in this direction," Spock insisted calmly.

"Look, Spock, there's a simple way to go about this," McCoy fumed. "I've been on this base before. Have you?"

"No, Doctor."

"Then take it from me, the hotel is this way."

"You are wrong, Doctor," Spock said firmly.

"Spock!"

But before McCoy could say more Spock raised his eyes to a large sign above their heads. McCoy followed his gaze. The sign proclaimed,

Galaxy Hotel  
Best Accommodation This Side of the Neutral Zone  
Conference Facilities  
All Species Catered For

A large neon arrow pointed in the direction Spock had indicated.

McCoy glared at the Vulcan. "If you say a word, I'll hit you," he grated.

Spock's eyebrow climbed into his black hair. "Really, Doctor!"

Without further ado the angry physician led the way towards the exits. They stepped onto the moving walkway and were swept through a clear tunnel, passing the buildings of the base until they reached the one they were seeking.

The Galaxy Hotel was the largest building, and more modern than the rest. It was built to accommodate the increasing population of Federation crews posted to patrol the Neutral Zone since the Klingon attacks on that sector.

McCoy had to admit it was a fine piece of construction, with large panoramic views of the night skies from its many rooms. After the enclosed world of the Enterprise it was a strange sensation to walk across the reception area, which was entirely made from a glass-like sheeting.

The Andorian at the desk was very helpful, and gave directions to the room set aside for their meeting with Phillips. Several conferences were being held at the hotel, and the building was crowded with hundreds of delegates trying to find their rooms.

Spock and McCoy had made their way up three levels when they became separated in a crowded hallway. One moment the tall Vulcan was in front of him, the next McCoy was pushed to one side by a crowd spilling from one of the conference rooms. He waited until most of the people had dispersed, expecting to see Spock waiting for him, but the hallway was deserted, except for a small cat-like being with a round face.

McCoy approached it carefully.

The creature turned and looked at him with bright amber eyes. "You wanted something?" it asked in reasonable Standard.

McCoy nodded. "Yes. I've lost my friend in the crowd. He's a Vulcan. Did you see him?"

"No, I cannot say that I did."

McCoy frowned and looked up and down the long hallway, not sure which was the correct way to go. He turned back to the 'cat'. "Do you know the way to Room 347?"

"Yes, I am going to a room nearby. Would you like to accompany me?"

"Please." McCoy breathed a sigh of relief.

He was confident that he would meet up with Spock eventually, and if the Vulcan broke his promise and took the chance to avoid the appointment McCoy would have him up on charges. Anger began to take over from worry. After all, it was easier to be angry with Spock than to worry about him. You only worry about people you care about, and there was no way McCoy was ready to admit, even to himself, how fond he had become of Spock.



They had many things in common, things that had sealed their friendship. Both had been hurt and lonely before joining the Enterprise, finding it hard to show their true feelings, until the Captain, in his amiable way, had unrelentingly hammered at their defences until the three were friends. But of the three Spock remained an enigma. McCoy and Kirk knew only the barest details of his life, as the Vulcan Council insisted that their nationals' personnel files were kept in secret.

As McCoy struggled to keep up with the 'cat' as it bounded along in front of him he kept glancing down the maze of passages that branched off the corridor they were in. No sign of Spock. Eventually they reached Room 343.

Amber eyes blinked at McCoy. "Your room is down there."

"Thanks for your help."

The cat-being gave a short purr before entering his room, leaving McCoy alone in the empty hallway. A glance told him that Spock wasn't waiting outside the room; perhaps he had already gone in to see the Doctor, so McCoy pressed the buzzer and waited.

Nothing happened.

After several moments he tried again, and a voice said, "Enter."

The man sitting behind a large desk stood as McCoy entered. "Leonard."

"Hello, Stanley. How are you?"

"Oh, keeping busy. Got an infernal headache, but can't grumble."

McCoy noted there was no sign of Spock. "Stan, has my friend arrived yet? We got separated a few moments ago on the way here."

Phillips looked uneasy. "No, not yet. Have a coffee while we wait for him."

The two men sipped their drinks and McCoy tried to start a conversation, but Phillips seemed distracted. He kept staring out of the window. McCoy gave up, putting the reason for his old friend's silence down to the headache. He glanced at the door, hoping that Spock would arrive to ease the strained atmosphere that had settled over the room.

After about thirty minutes Phillips stood up. "Perhaps your friend has changed his mind about coming to see me."

"If he has, he'll be in trouble," McCoy said.

Phillips nodded. "If he does develop the full-blown illness he certainly will have trouble, Leonard."

They had more coffee and made endless small talk until after a couple of hours Phillips said, "I really think he isn't coming."

McCoy didn't answer, but took out his communicator. "McCoy to Enterprise."

Uhura's voice answered immediately. "Enterprise."

"Has Mr Spock beamed back on board yet?"

"Just one moment, Doctor. I'll check for you."

A few seconds of silence, then, "Hello, Doctor." It was the Captain's voice. "Spock hasn't reported back since he left with you. What's up?"

"Well, Jim, I'm not too sure. We got separated in a crowd. I'm with Dr. Phillips, and Spock hasn't shown up yet."

"Perhaps he's decided not to see the Doctor after all, and is on his way back."

"Jim, it's been nearly three hours. He'd be back by now. I told him this was important. We can't help him if he's not here. He promised me..."

"He actually promised you? He said it?" Kirk sounded concerned.

"Yes."

"Oh." Kirk was worried. Spock would never renege on a given promise. His word was his bond. His pride as a Vulcan would never allow him to go back on his word.

"If he's chickened out, so help me..." McCoy muttered.

Stanley Phillips interrupted, "Look, Leonard, I'm sorry, I really can't wait any longer. I must get back home. Your friend will be all right. I wouldn't worry if I were you."

Considering the serious nature of Spock's illness McCoy thought that was a strange thing to say, but then Phillips had been a bit peculiar all morning.

"Jim, I'll be up in a moment," McCoy said.

"Okay, Bones. I'll let the transporter room know." Kirk closed communication.

"I'm sorry you had a wasted visit, Stan," McCoy said, noticing the agitated way Phillips kept looking at the door, then the window. Perhaps it was worry over Spock's disappearance.

"Doesn't matter. It was nice to see you again. Look, Len, you know how these aliens are. It's easy to forget the differences, but remember, they don't always think like us. Perhaps your Vulcan is feeling well at the moment, and considers a visit to me a waste of his time. He might have gone to see one of his own healers."

McCoy didn't think that Spock would just have upped and left for Vulcan without telling Jim; he wasn't lax about regulations. No, McCoy couldn't believe he would go absent without leave. There was something wrong. He shook hands with Phillips and wished him a safe journey before asking to be beamed back to the Enterprise.

He was met in the transporter room by Captain Kirk. "Well, Bones?"

"Is Spock back on board yet?"

"No, not yet."

"I'm getting worried, Jim."

"I told you both to contact the ship if you were going to be longer than twenty-four hours. When that deadline is up, if Spock hasn't made a report I'll put out a general call for him around the base."

McCoy looked more cheerful. "He's a fool. That man down there could have helped him."

Kirk nodded. "Well, I'll reserve judgement until Spock explains himself, Bones. Now go and get something to eat - you're back on duty in a few hours, don't forget."

McCoy gripped Kirk's arm for a moment. "Let me know if there's any news."

"You'll be the first, Bones."

### Illogical Love

Spock came slowly to consciousness, the sound of sobbing rousing him. He was stiff and cold, his head ached, his fingers and legs were numb. Across the room sat a boy huddled into a tight ball, arms wrapped around his shoulders, his wrists manacled by heavy chains. He was Human. Blood smeared his face.

As he realised that Spock was awake and observing him, the sobbing stopped. "Who are you?"

"Spock."

"I'm Rupert Phillips."

Spock's eyebrow rose. "Phillips?"

"Yes. Why are they holding us here? Do you know?"

Spock tried to ease himself into a sitting position. "No, I do not. Who is responsible for our confinement?"

The boy unwrapped his arms. Chains clanked. "I've never seen anyone like them before. I don't think they belong to the Federation."

"Have they harmed you?" Spock asked gently.

"Not much. My head is bleeding a bit."

"So I see."

They lapsed into silence.

Spock inspected what he could see of their prison. He was chained, as was the boy, to a large ring set low into the wall. The chains were tight, and made of a metal he had never seen before, but he suspected that it would be impossible to escape without the aid

of a laser torch or similar cutting tool. The air was stuffy, foul almost, and the lighting dim, as if adjusted for beings with a lower light tolerance than Humans. A low drone indicated that they were aboard a ship, one in flight. Where they were, or where they were going, he had no idea. He found it difficult to gauge how long he had been held, since his inbuilt ability to calculate time was hampered by unconsciousness.

Spock's last memory had been of a strange face peering close to his, a sharp pain as of a hypo, then nothing. He shook his head to try to clear the mists of pain that washed over him, but it only made the dizziness worse. He clearly remembered being with McCoy in the hotel corridor, being separated from him by a crowd, then strong arms pulling him backwards into an open doorway.

Was McCoy being held too? If so, where? And why? For Federation secrets? As a Commander he held valuable information, but surely his captors must know that Vulcans were able to resist most forms of torture, and McCoy as Ship's Surgeon would not be in possession of any information likely to be of use to an enemy.

Why was the boy being held? Phillips - that was the name of McCoy's friend. Was there a connection?

So the hours passed. The boy fell asleep, and Spock put himself into a light trance to relax and rest his aching body.

The clang of the metal door roused them both. Spock blinked his eyes and looked up into the face of a high-ranking Klingon officer.

"So, Mr Spock, welcome."

"Why do you hold me here?"

"Is it not obvious?"

"The Federation is not as yet at war with the Klingon people."

The officer smiled. "Not yet, Spock. But to answer your question, you are here, as the Terrans say, to be bait to catch a larger fish."

Spock had noted two other Klingons standing behind the officer, blocking the narrow doorway.

"I am Krath," the officer continued. "This is my vessel, and there will be no escape, except by my order - or by death. If you cooperate things will go easily for you, otherwise..." He did not need to go into details; Spock knew only too well what they were capable of.

Suddenly Krath stood to one side and the two warriors behind him entered and undid the chains that held the boy, dragging him struggling to his feet.

Rupert screamed out in fear. "What are you going to do?"

Krath smiled wickedly. "Your father, the good Doctor, cooperated with us, and you are now of no further use."

Spock tried to stand, but his numb legs would not support his weight; he thought the reason could be the result of some drug.

"Leave the boy," he shouted. It sounded almost like a plea, and he was surprised himself at the emotion in his voice.

"Begging, Vulcan? Surely not! Well, as you forget your precious Vulcan impassivity, how can I refuse you?"

Spock didn't like Krath's tone. He held his fear for the boy tight within, his face betraying nothing of his thoughts.

Krath said quietly, with a deadly menace, "As you wish. We will leave him here."

The room lit with the flash of a disruptor beam, and the boy slumped dead to the floor.

"You have your wish, Vulcan. He can stay here... or would you prefer the carcass out there after all?" asked Krath with a sneer.

Spock didn't answer.

"Nothing to say, Vulcan? Then I shall decide for you. Dispatch the body from the garbage hatch. Remove a finger first and bring it to me. Take the Vulcan to the interrogation room," Krath snapped.

The body was roughly gathered up, Spock's chains were unfastened and he was pulled to his feet. He felt sadness at the merciless killing of the boy, but didn't have time to dwell on it as he was pulled along the dark passageways of the ship, his legs still refusing to support him. At last he was thrust into a chair, and his sore wrists snapped into clamps.

Krath stood in the doorway, hardly visible. "Vulcan, as a valuable member of Starfleet, and also the son and only heir of a prominent member of Vulcan's highest family, you possess valuable information, which I intend to have. Before you remind me of the powers your species has developed to block your thoughts from me, I have something to show you." He waved an arm, and from the darkness came an older Klingon who carefully carried a small black box, and what looked to Spock like electrodes.

Krath smiled. "Let me introduce our latest development. As a scientist you will no doubt find it interesting. The mindsifter."

Spock remained still and quiet, trying to block his mind to all around him. He could guess the purpose of the box.

Very quickly the Klingon guards attached the electrodes to Spock's forehead and then left the room.

Krath turned to the old man. "Continue," he ordered.

Spock tensed.

At first the feeling was just a slight tremor that passed like a breeze through his mind. A faint light glimmered at the back of his eyes... bearable.

And then...

... everything turned to blazing white light.

His head felt as though it was being torn open. Spock could hear a distant scream, but it was several moments before he realised

that it came from his own mouth. He continued to try to block his mind from them, but the harder he tried the worse the light, the pain, became.

His fingers gripped the chair, knuckles white and bony. He tried to think of Vulcan. The Forge. His home. His dead pet, long gone. Anything that would not be of use to his interrogators.

But the machine sent tendrils far into the recesses of his mind, forever searching, probing... finding.

Spock continued to fight against the mindsifter, but his strength was ebbing fast. His heart pounded in his ears. Darkness at last claimed him and he slumped down, head resting on his chest.

Krath was worried at the sudden deterioration in the Vulcan, and turned to the old man. "Stop! Enough!" He strode over and, taking a handful of the Vulcan's black silky hair, pulled his head up, gazing into the pale face. "I do not want him dead... yet. Arrange for him to be returned to the holding pen."

Spock was carried back to his cell, where he was thrown to land with a crashing blow against the far wall, to lie unconscious, green blood trickling from the cuts and grazes caused by the rough treatment. He lay alone for several hours, not knowing that Krath had ordered a film to be taken of his crumpled form.

When Spock finally came to his head ached, and he could feel no sensation in his feet. Dizziness swept over him as he tried to gather his thoughts and remember what had happened since the killing of Rupert Phillips. What had he unwittingly told Krath? He could not remember anything clearly. Had he given details of the Enterprise? He shook his head, trying to clear it, but the only effect it had was to increase the pain to an almost intolerable level. Spock sat back against the cold metal wall and tried to initiate a healing trance.

Hours passed without anyone entering the cell. When he came out of the trance he was still dizzy. Was it hunger, thirst? Or the effects of drugs? Perhaps it was the mindsifter. The name was certainly apt; he did indeed feel as though his mind had been taken out, shaken, and returned.

His earliest thought had been to kill himself, or provoke the Klingons into doing it for him. If he had betrayed the Federation, the Enterprise, its crew - worst of all, Jim - then he should die. Now he decided that it would be more honourable if he could escape and warn the Federation of the existence of the mindsifter.

But how could he escape? He was no longer chained to the wall, but he could hardly stand, so his guards must have been confident that he was too weak to walk.

He tried to pull himself upright, using his long fingers to grip the rings inset into the shiny wall. Several attempts ended in failure, but at last he stood, tottering and swaying, on the point of collapse - but he stood. Spock allowed his Human half a moment of elation before pushing it away, back down, and the Vulcan mask took its place.

Back on the Starship Enterprise time was Jim Kirk's enemy. He

could delay his departure no longer, not even for Spock. He could not ignore his duty to Starfleet, and his orders were explicit, leaving no room for deviation.

"Prepare to leave orbit, Mr. Sulu."

McCoy, who stood at his shoulder, whispered loudly, "What about Spock?"

"I know, Bones. We'll be back as soon as we've carried out our present orders."

"But that could take months!"

"Bones." Kirk looked at him, hurt in his eyes. "Don't make this any harder, okay?"

The Doctor nodded. "All right, Jim. I'll get off your back. Sorry."

The Captain stared at the large viewscreen, which at the time of leaving orbit was showing a rear view. The base receded to a small dot against the vastness of space. He couldn't shake off the feeling that he had let Spock down; he was not at all sure that if their roles had been reversed Spock would have broken orbit.

A yeoman brought some stock records needing his attention, and the business of running the giant Starship prevented more thoughts of Spock.

That was, until the Science Section sent Lt. Severan to the bridge to cover for Spock's absence.

By this time everyone knew that the First Officer was not on board, and it wasn't hard to see, from the Captain's face, that something was wrong.

Kirk glanced across at Severan as she sat down in the seat that was usually occupied by the Vulcan, and noticed that her face showed signs of recent tears. He left the command chair and crossed to her. She was trying to put on a brave show, but on Kirk's approach the tears began again.

"I'm very sorry, sir. I'm... upset. Mr. Spock has been so good to me."

"Carry on, Lieutenant. Mr. Spock will be pleased if I can report that you carried on during this... difficult time."

"Yes, sir." She quickly wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and began to scan the sector that lay in the path of the Enterprise. "Mr. Spock wouldn't approve of crying, would he, sir?"

"No... no, he wouldn't."

There was something so reassuring in the calm way the Captain was handling the absence of Mr. Spock. She knew that if he wasn't too worried then everything would be all right. Little did she know Kirk's real feelings - and the sleepless nights that were to follow.

The Vulcan Embassy on Earth received a coded message for Sarek

at about the same time the Enterprise left Starbase 7. He recognised it as coming from the Klingon representative.

Sarek calmly ordered the tape to be fed through to his personal viewer in his private apartments, and continued his meeting with the delegation of miners from Tricalite.

It was a difficult meeting. He tried to explain the damage caused to their home planet by the uncontrolled dumping of poisonous residue, but logic was not one of the miners' strong points. The gathering broke up with no progress made whatsoever. If Sarek had been given to emotion he would have been very frustrated, but his face gave no indication of it at all.

Amanda, his Human wife and the mother of his son, welcomed him when he entered his private apartments.

"My husband." She resisted a smile of welcome and used the Vulcan greeting, two fingers gently touching his. "A long meeting. I was expecting you earlier."

"It was difficult, Amanda, but I shall persevere until a satisfactory conclusion is reached for all concerned."

"I know you will. Come - there is food prepared."

Sarek took her hand and said lovingly, "I have a final duty before joining you, my wife."

"Oh Sarek! It's been a long day, you need to rest."

"Do not be troubled. I shall not be long."

Sarek went to the room set aside as his office and switched on the tape. Immediately Krath's face appeared on the screen.

"Greetings, Sarek." A pause. "I have not yet had the pleasure of a meeting with you, but I predict you will soon become a good friend of the Glorious Empire."

Sarek reached to switch the tape off in disgust, but as if Krath was reading his mind he said with a snarl, "Continue listening to this message, or you will miss my gift to you." With a smile the Klingon continued, "I understand you have not seen your offspring for several years. He is an officer on an Earth ship, is he not? Would you care to see what a fine example of Vulcan manhood he has grown into?"

The picture flickered and for a brief moment the screen went blank, then a flash of blue appeared against the darkness. Sarek took a deep breath as the picture cleared to reveal his son, Spock.

There was no mistake. It was his son lying unconscious, so much thinner than the last time Sarek had seen him. Green blood dripped from cuts on his pale face to stain the Starfleet uniform, the uniform that had come to represent the gulf that had lain between father and son all these long years. Sarek swallowed hard and fought to shut down the feelings that threatened to swamp him.

The picture of his son remained on the screen as Krath's voice continued, "Think about what you see, Sarek of Vulcan. In two Earth hours I shall be contacting you again, not by viewer but by subspace radio. Make very sure we are alone, and we can discuss your son's



life expectancy, and what you can do for the Empire to prolong it."

The screen held the image of Spock for several moments before the tape came to an end. Sarek put out a hand to the blank screen, as if by doing so he could hold Spock there.

A small sound made Sarek turn. Standing in the doorway, a hand clutching her throat, was Amanda, horror on her usually calm face. Sarek knew she had entered in time to hear the end of Krath's message.

He rose and took her in his strong arms. "We cannot give in to blackmail, my wife," he said quietly.

She pulled away, choking back sobs. "You must do something! Did you see? It's our son... Sarek, it was Spock. You must help him. Oh god... He was hurt."

"If I do it will be never-ending, Amanda. It would not be logical to leave ourselves open to further threats. We must resist their demands. That is the only way to defeat this evil attempt to use our son as a weapon against the Federation and Vulcan."

"How can you be so unfeeling? It's your son! Even on Vulcan family means something. All Spock's life you've made impossible demands on him and I've kept silent, but now is your chance to make amends. Please, Sarek, for my sake, for me if not for him, help him!"

Sarek shook his head. "Oh my wife, you do not know the Klingons' treachery as I do. Spock is probably already dead. That tape could be months old."

Amanda hadn't heard Sarek speak Spock's name since their son had left to join Starfleet all those years ago. She stared into her husband's face, trying to read what was behind his blank expression.

"You think he is dead?"

"Yes."

That was too much for Amanda; she ran from the room.

Sarek sank down on a chair and gazed at the blank screen, deep in thoughts of the past. Amanda had been correct; he *had* made demands on Spock as a child, but it had been necessary. The boy had been born of a Human mother. True, it had not been of Spock's choosing, but of his, but Sarek had to accept that there were problems because of that choice. It had not been logical to expect that the Human elements would not show themselves in his child.

It would have been so much more acceptable if the child had resembled a Human; the Vulcans would not have expected so much from a Terran. After all, Vulcan was often host to off-worlders, and their excesses of emotion were excused as part of their immaturity as a race. However, the boy's only Human trait was his constant show of emotion. He was entirely Vulcan in appearance, therefore he was expected to act like one on a world where it was considered at best bad taste to show his feelings, at worst an insult to the memory of Surak.

Spock's Vulcan appearance had led to many confrontations with other Vulcans, who thought that his displays of tears as a child

were a deliberate insult to them, not understanding that the tears were part of his Human heritage that he had not yet learned to control.

Sarek had sought to protect his son by teaching strict observance of Vulcan control, with no leeway allowed. The lessons had been painful, not only for Spock and Amanda, but he knew that the demands he made on his son were nothing to what would be expected of him as he reached maturity and took his rightful place as head of the family.

All Sarek had done he had done to try to make his son's life on Vulcan easier, but the independent streak inherited from Amanda had caused Spock to rebel finally against the repression of individual choice in the matter of his future.

Vulcan duty was clear. Sarek had followed it as a youth without question, as had his father before him. Why did his son, with a brilliant mind, wish to throw his birthright away and leave his home to join a primitive species in their warlike exploration of space? Sarek was no nearer understanding his son than the day he was born. There had been no other option; he was duty bound to follow Vulcan tradition and disown his son.

No-one, not even Amanda, knew to what lengths he had gone to try to avoid doing so. He had risked everything in a bid to save his son from being declared *k'unitrath* - cast off.

T'Pol had - surprisingly - not dismissed his plea out of hand, but had listened to him patiently before referring him to the Masters of Gol. Sarek suspected that T'Pol had a fondness for her hybrid grandchild, but the Masters had had no hesitation in strongly advising him to sever all links with a son who rejected the family tradition so emotionally. It was, after all, the logical thing to do. Why, then, did he feel such pain when he walked into the room Spock had used as a child?

The memory of the unconscious figure lying in the Klingon cell reminded Sarek of a time long ago when Spock had tried to climb to the top of the high wall that surrounded their home on Vulcan and had fallen heavily, banging his head sharply. Amanda had not controlled her tears as Sarek had borne the small unconscious child to a Healer.

Hours later, Spock had explained that he had just wanted to get closer to the stars. Not logical... but understandable.

Sarek felt his love for his son rise within him, and was glad he was alone so that Amanda would not see the tear roll down his cheek. If it was hard for *him* to control his emotions... how much harder had it been for his son?

### A Cry For Help

Jim Kirk made his way to Spock's cabin. The security lock wasn't engaged, but then it never was. Spock didn't like locks. On his home planet, Vulcan, there was no need for them.

On entering the heat hit him like a hammer, and his feet felt as if he was standing in treacle until he got used to the change in gravity. He looked at the red walls decorated with old Vulcan

weapons, remembering how Spock had told him they served as a constant reminder of Vulcan's violent past before the teaching of Surak, enforcing the need to control emotions at all times.

The small fire bowl still glowed in front of the strange figurine. He glanced at the meditation stone; it seemed as though Spock would appear from the shower at any moment, refreshed and eager for their nightly game of chess.

But he knew it was not to be.

Kirk made his way to Spock's desk, still littered with scribbled notes in unintelligible Vulcan script, computer discs, books, and a small black box made of some kind of shell.

Kirk turned the box over in his hands. The workmanship was superb. He carefully slid the lid open to reveal a small tuft of pale fur cushioned on a bed of downy fibrous cloth. He knew that this was Spock's most treasured possession, carefully kept as a keepsake of Spock's only childhood friend, his pet sehlat. Exactly what a sehlat was, Kirk had never found out.

Spock was indeed a strange man, one who insisted he had no emotions, yet who kept a few hairs from a long-dead pet. Kirk couldn't believe his friend would have left the box behind if he had planned to leave the ship for good. So, where was he?

Time slipped by and Kirk just sat in his friend's cabin, as if by his being there Spock would appear, by magic. He thought back to the first time he had met his Science Officer, a year ago.

The cool reception. The dark eyes that missed nothing. The calm way Spock had taken him on a tour of his first command. How nervous he had been! Spock must have known it, but gave no sign, quietly and easily answering all Kirk's questions, even the stupid ones. Kirk hadn't realised how much he had relied on Spock those first months. The First Officer had ensured that the ship ran smoothly, keeping all unnecessary worries from the new Captain to give him time to settle in to his command.

Kirk was so deep in his memories that at first he didn't realise he was no longer alone. A small cough made him look up into the eyes of Nurse Chapel.

"Yes, Nurse?"

"I'm sorry, Captain - I just wondered if..." she stammered.

"Yes?"

"If Mr. Spock was coming back."

"I hope so, Christine," Kirk said with feeling.

For a brief moment rank was forgotten. They were just two people who both loved the same man, each in their own way.

Nurse Chapel tried to smile. "I'm sure it will be all right, sir. Mr. Spock... well, he's special, isn't he?"

Kirk nodded. Words had failed him.

Christine blinked back tears. "I'm very sorry, sir. I've

acted out of order. Please forgive me - it was just..."

Kirk stood up and rested his hands on her shoulders. "I'm sure Mr. Spock will be pleased to hear that you cared enough to come here."

"Oh please don't tell him, sir! It would just embarrass him, and I wouldn't like to do that."

"Very well, it will be our secret."

She managed a smile, and left.

Kirk made his way back to the bridge shortly afterwards, unable to bear the heat of Spock's cabin any longer.

Amanda sat alone in her room. She now regretted the harsh way she had spoken to Sarek, but why didn't he understand, after all these years, her Human need to help and protect her child, even if he was now a fully grown man?

She drifted into memories of his childhood. He had been the most beautiful baby, growing into a shy, clever child. For a few short years she had had the chance of being close to him, giving him the love and cuddles a child raised on Earth would receive, but all too soon he was lost to her.

No, not really lost, just instructed in the Vulcan culture, and never again was their relationship on such an informal level as her son strove to prove himself a true Vulcan and gain his father's esteem.

She remembered a particular incident. Spock had been four or five years old. She had taken him on a trip to the city as a reward for achieving high grades in a physics exam. She had found it strange that Spock was intellectually years ahead of his Human counterparts, but emotionally at the same level.

They had become separated in the crowd. She had heard him calling her name, but by the time she had found him he had begun to cry. He was surrounded by angry Vulcans. When she reached him a woman had demanded that she should take him off the street, as it was disgusting that a Vulcan child should behave like that in a public place, setting a bad example to others. Spock had slipped his small hand into hers and looked up at her with his dark eyes, seeking reassurance. He had needed her then; perhaps he needed her now.

Making up her mind to turn thoughts into actions, she made her way to the embassy communications room. The Vulcan operator looked up.

"Lady Amanda, is there something I can do?"

"Yes, Stimm. I wish to send a private message to the Captain of a Federation Starship, the Enterprise. Will you arrange an open channel for me, then leave me alone for a short while."

He looked unsure. "But Lady, there must be someone here at all times."

"Stimm, I will be here, will I not?"

"Yes, of course. Very well."

He began to find the position of the ship and patched into a free channel. Once it was open, and he had left the room, Amanda moved towards the unit. A voice stopped her in her tracks.

"Amanda, what are you doing?"

She turned guiltily to face Sarek, and decided that attack was the best method of defence. "My husband, if you are unwilling to help our son, perhaps his friends and colleagues in Starfleet will."

There was a long silence. She knew how he felt about Starfleet.

"Go back to your room," he said evenly.

Her chin rose in defiance. "I will not."

He sighed. "Amanda, as my wife, you will obey me."

She gazed into his unblinking eyes and relented, but as she left the room she said passionately, "I shall never forgive you, Sarek, if Spock is alive and you did nothing to help him."

Sarek turned without another word and stared out of the window, deep in thought, then he sat down at the transmitter. He hit only the audio and scramble switches.

Captain Kirk had nearly finished his shift and was about to hand the con to Sulu when Uhura called to him.

"Captain, there's a rather strange message coming through. I think you should hear it."

"You have the con, Mr. Sulu."

"Yes, sir."

As he entered the turbolift Kirk said, "Patch the message through to my cabin, Lieutenant."

On entering his cabin, he flicked a switch on his desk intercom. "Okay, Lieutenant, put it through. Where is it from?"

Uhura sounded faintly frustrated. "It's audio only, and it's been scrambled, so I can't trace the origin, except that I think it's somewhere in Earth's system."

"Okay, play it."

A robotic voice filled the cabin. "USS Enterprise, Science Officer Spock is held aboard Klingon battlecruiser Helio."

Uhura's voice followed. "Message ends, sir."

Kirk sat silent for several seconds, letting the words sink in. Then he pulled himself together, and snapped into action.

"Right, Uhura, make a copy of that and send it to Admiral Komack at Starfleet HQ with the following cover message.

"USS Enterprise, Captain Kirk commanding. Unauthorised Klingon ship believed to be in Federation territory and responsible for the abduction of my First Officer. Enterprise investigating, and will continue with original mission as soon as possible. Kirk out."

"When you've sent that, ask Dr. McCoy to come to my cabin. That's all."

"Yes, Captain."

So the mystery of Spock's disappearance was solved. Kirk had hoped it was something simple, like a missed shuttle, an accident even - but Klingons! God, what did they want with Spock? Secrets? Revenge? He dreaded to dwell on what Spock was going through.

He punched the intercom again. "Records?"

"Sir?"

"Get me all we've got on a Klingon ship called Helio."

"H.E.L.I.O?" the ensign spelled.

"Correct."

"Searching now, sir."

Kirk waited impatiently. Spock would have had the information at his fingertips in seconds.

The sound of static gave way to the ensign's voice again. "Got it, sir. Klingon vessel Helio. Its commander is Krath. It's new, commissioned only in the last six months or so. First sighted four months ago in the Beta system. Believed to be armed with a new weapon. That's all, sir."

"Do we know the ship's complement?"

"About a dozen, sir, but as it's a new ship there could be more or..."

"Less. Yes, okay, thank you," Kirk snapped, then thinking better of it he said in a much gentler voice, "Thank you, Ensign."

"Glad to help, sir."

There was a buzz at the door. Kirk operated the release and McCoy entered, looking anxious.

"Is there any news yet?"

"Yes, Bones, and I almost wish there wasn't."

"Well don't keep it to yourself. What?"

Kirk sighed. "Spock... there was a message..." His voice tailed off.

McCoy was beginning to lose his temper at the delay, then he

read the expression on Kirk's face.

"Jim, tell me... is he dead?" His hands were in tight fists, dreading the reply.

"No. At least, I don't think so. I don't know. I believe the Klingons may have him, if the message I've just received is correct."

"What message? Who sent it?"

"I don't know. It was scrambled. It just said that Spock was held on a Klingon battlecruiser."

McCoy sank into a chair. "Well, Jim, if it's true, you know Spock must be dead... or wishing he was."

Kirk nodded. "Yes, I know," he said quietly. "But I'm going to try to find out for sure, then I'm going to blast that ship to hell where it belongs."

"Jim, the Federation isn't officially at war with the Klingons," the Doctor pointed out.

Kirk smiled for the first time. "Well, maybe it should be."

"Yes, but are you the one to start a war, Jim? Is that what Spock would have wanted? You know he didn't hold with unnecessary killing."

"Don't tell me about unnecessary killing! Have you any idea what Klingons do to prisoners? Vulcans are a challenge for them, a chance to have their fun for a longer time. Vulcans are stronger than us..." His voice throbbed with emotion. "They last longer..." Then, pulling himself together, he too sat down and out his head in his hands. "I'm sorry, Bones."

McCoy smiled briefly. "It's all right. I guess we both need a little time to get used to what's happened."

"I'll never accept it, not unless I see his body." The last word was barely a whisper.

"If the Klingons act as they usually do when they get their hands on a Starfleet officer, well... there might not be a..." The Doctor stopped as he realised what effect the facts might have on his friend. After all, Kirk wasn't a surgeon, used to seeing the terrible things Klingons could do to a man before they let death rob them of their plaything.

But Jim Kirk had been an officer long enough to make an educated guess at what Bones was hinting at. The thought of that gentle Vulcan having to suffer in such a way made him sick.

No! Spock would be better off dead. The quicker the better.

"We've got to find that ship," Kirk said as much to himself as to the Doctor.

"I agree, Jim, but how?"

"We'll scan every sector until we find it. I'll get every Federation ship to do the same. I'll call in all the debts I have

owing."

The Doctor thought that at least while the Captain was busy with that he wouldn't have so much time to mull over Spock's fate. "I'll assign all unnecessary medical personnel to help, Jim."

"Thanks, Bones. Let's get to it."

The Captain ordered Chekov to plot a new course back to Starbase 5, where Dr. Stanley Phillips was working. The Doctor might know something that would help them discover where the Klingons intended taking Spock, and why. Kirk was sure that Phillips was involved; he had a gut feeling that wouldn't go away, until he had spoken to Phillips face to face.

McCoy had been wrong when he thought that being busy would stop Jim Kirk worrying about Spock. The tall Vulcan never left his thoughts. They had only been working together for a year, and had been friends for much less, but Spock had filled a gap that Jim Kirk hadn't even realised existed in his life until now.

That night Kirk had a vivid dream. Spock was calling for help.

### All or Nothing

Spock was dragged roughly to his feet. He was still feeling very dizzy, and had begun to recall the symptoms listed by Dr. McCoy. He was now not so certain that the Klingon drugs were responsible for his increasing loss of energy. His attempt to stand unaided came to nothing, and he felt the guards' strong hands clamp around his arms, cutting off his blood supply.

Krath strolled into the dim cell and stood a few paces away, hands on hips, glaring at the Vulcan. "I have just spoken to your father. He refuses to cooperate."

Spock looked at the Klingon, his dark eyes unblinking. "If you had taken the trouble to consult me first, I would have pointed out that in fact my father has severed my connection with the family. He has no interest in my well-being."

"I would have thought he would have had an interest in the future of the Federation."

Spock did not answer, his face impassive.

"Well, it is of no matter. I am sure your friend Kirk will be much more accommodating... when he realises what is at stake."

The slanted eyebrows rose a fraction.

Krath was desperately trying to salvage something of his grand plan. Sarek was a fool! Unless, of course, he realised that his son's life was as good as over, and that there had never been any intention of letting him live.

But the Human was a different matter. Humans rushed into situations without thinking. Friendship was important to them. Yes, Krath was very hopeful that Kirk would come after the Vulcan. And when he did...



The Federation would be a Starship less, and the Empire would be free at last of the thorn that had been in its side for far too long. Krath would return a hero, and establish himself in the higher circle.

In the meantime he had promised his officers some entertainment, which the Vulcan would provide. "Take him. You may play a while. He appears weaker than a full Vulcan; it should be interesting to find out how long he will last."

Spock was pulled along a narrow corridor and into another room crowded with Klingons. Uproar greeted his arrival as he was flung to the floor. When he tried to drag himself up a booted foot hit him squarely in the face. Blood began to drip down into his eyes. He tried to wipe it away, only to have his arm twisted behind his back. Pain knifed through his shoulder.

He bit his lip to prevent a scream, and tried to raise his shields to block the pain, but they eluded him. He was now on his feet again, held between two Klingons. They resisted all his attempts to pull free. Spock tried again to raise his shields, but they evaporated within seconds of forming. He could only assume that his weakened condition was to blame, and knew that he must take whatever the Klingons dispensed with what little strength he had left. He would die without shaming his Vulcan ancestry.

A particularly vicious officer stood in front of him. Spock raised his head and tried to see, but the flow of green blood effectively blinded him.

"You Vulcan swine, you will pay for every brave Klingon who has died at the hands of the Federation! Cry for mercy - it is the only way you will earn a quick death!"

Spock swallowed blood and said quietly, "I ask you for nothing."

"Then that is your first mistake!"

The Klingon spat into Spock's face before punching the helpless Vulcan in the stomach. The two guards let go of his arms and he fell back to the ground, doubled up. A mighty cheer of approval went up from the crowd.

Again Spock was dragged to his feet and held between the guards. The officer drew a knife from his belt and held it in front of the stoic figure.

"Have you reconsidered? Beg!"

Spock raised fathomless eyes, his face expressionless.

The lack of response to his threats inflamed the Klingon, and he ran the blade of the knife across the thin, muscular chest, ripping the bloodstained blue shirt and leaving a bright trail of green oozing in its wake, but even this had no effect on the blank face; the expression remained the same.

"You Vulcans - what is it with you? You do not live, you are just machines. Well, even machines can be disabled. He is yours."

The crowd moved forward, and Spock's world exploded in a sea of pain. He felt the slam of the hard deck as the two guards let go of

his arms, and his legs, no longer able to support him, gave way. Blows began to rain down from all directions, and he knew no more.

The unconscious Vulcan was carried back to his cell, where a dish of food and a pitcher of water were left for him. After all, Krath might need the bait a little longer, and he provided the crew with recreation.

When Spock came to he was in great pain, but there were no bones broken. He managed to invoke a healing trance of sorts, but as there was no-one to wake him he did not go too deeply, just enough to dull the worst of the pain and to control the bleeding from the wound across his chest. The cut above his eye had stopped bleeding already. He wiped his hands across his eyes to remove the congealed blood that had impaired his vision.

His head ached, and he didn't understand why his control of pain had failed him. Was it as a result of the blows he had received, the mindsifter, or - more ominously - another sign of the anaemia that lay in his body waiting to claim him? Perhaps it would kill him before the Klingons did.

He must escape or die - he could never let them use him to trap the Enterprise. If he was to escape it must be soon, before his weakened condition made it impossible. He tried to eat some of the food they had left him, but he only retched, so he made do with some of the tepid water. Sleep came unbidden.

He awoke feeling stronger. The food was still there, and this time he managed to keep it down. He sat with his back against the wall and rested while he contemplated the best method of escape.

He was no longer chained. Carefully he rubbed the raw skin on his wrists where the chains had chafed the pale skin. As part of his training he had studied the design of Klingon ships, and although he knew this one was of modern construction the basics were the same, so he had a good idea where the shuttle deck was located, and it would not be hard to find the computer banks. He decided to wait a while and see what routine, if any, the guards followed.

They came at six-hour intervals to change his water and slop bowl. Spock's internal clock was working well again, and he knew to the second when he would hear the stamp of boots heralding the guards' approach. They came in twos, one standing at the door while the other entered the cell.

Spock carefully pulled himself to his feet and edged to the cell door. His heart beat like a hammer, his breath came in gasps. He knew that the waves of weakness warned of coma and death, and hoped he had enough time to carry out his plan.

The clank as the brawny Klingon pushed the heavy door open signalled Spock to stand to the side, in the shadows. As the guard entered Spock shot his foot out, tripping the Klingon, while at the same time he reached round the door and grabbed the other guard, pulling him inside the room. Once inside, a neck pinch dealt with him.

Spock turned his attention to the other, who was picking himself up, only to be met by Spock's fist. The Klingon went down as if he was pole-axed. Spock rubbed his bruised knuckles. He could never understand why Jim preferred this old-fashioned way of fighting when it caused so much pain in order to disable an enemy.

Waves of dizziness washed over him, and he had to lean against the wall for a few seconds until his head cleared enough to allow him to stand without support. His head was throbbing, and his eyes seemed unable to focus properly. He knew now without a doubt that the anaemia was in the process of attacking his body.

Spock pulled himself away from the support of the wall and took the keys from the unconscious guard's belt. Locking the door of the cell, he made his way towards the transporter deck.

He was lucky; as he walked his acute hearing gave him warning of any approaching Klingons, and he had enough time to hide. Once he backed into a cabin to find it occupied, but the Klingon was soon disabled by a neck pinch. Spock, exhausted by what was normally not a taxing physical manoeuvre, slumped to the deck to rest. He knew he would have to risk being discovered until the strength returned to his legs. He sank into semi-consciousness, his mind drifting back into the past...

His thoughts took him back to the struggle he had had as a child to master the art of the neck pinch. How patient his father had been with Spock's many failures. It was hard to think that the same father had dismissed his pleas for understanding when it came to his choice of career. He had used every logical argument he could think of, had pleaded, cajoled, all to no avail.

In desperation Spock had turned to his mother for support, but deep inside had known that she would not, could not, be seen to oppose Sarek's wishes. He loved his father, and the rift between them was a sadness he had carried deeply hidden in his heart, along with all the other Human feelings he was ashamed to show.

Across the emptiness of space Sarek suddenly sat up in bed. He gasped for air, and the noise woke Amanda.

"Whatever is the matter?" she asked in panic.

"Spock."

"What do you mean?"

Sarek did not answer at first, but staggered to the window. Thrusting it open he took large gulps of the night air before turning back into the room.

"Amanda, when Spock was born there was a traditional ceremony. Do you remember?"

She thought back. "Yes. T'Pau came to the house, with the Elders, but I didn't attend."

"No. It was because you are a Terran, at that time unskilled in the mind meld. If you had been of Vulcan blood you too would have taken part."

She moved to the edge of the bed and looked into Sarek's eyes. "Tell me, what happens at the ceremony?"

"A link is formed between the child and its parents."

"So you and Spock have this link?"

"When Spock was declared k'unitrath the link was to be broken... forever."

Amanda reached out to Sarek and gently touched his arm. He felt her love wash over him.

"I could not break the link, Amanda. It has remained since our son's birth. Never before have I felt it... until tonight. It has significance..."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that our son lives; but the fact that the link has been activated is a sign that he is in distress."

"But he is alive?"

"Yes, our son lives, Amanda."

### Know the Enemy

While Spock was attempting his escape from the Klingon ship the Enterprise was approaching Starbase 5. Captain Kirk had called Dr. McCoy to the briefing room, and they sat with endless cups of coffee, trying to pool their thoughts and ideas.

"I guess Stan was kinda funny, you know, when I asked if Spock had got there before me. He excused his vagueness with a headache. 'Course, I hadn't seen him for so long..."

"Did he say anything that might help? Think, Bones."

"I've done nothing else *but* think about it! He said that perhaps Spock had had a change of mind; he said aliens aren't like us."

Kirk frowned. "That's stating the obvious."

McCoy poured himself another cup of coffee and offered the jug to Kirk, who shook his head in refusal. McCoy didn't like to mention it, but Jim wanted to hear it all.

"Stan did say that if Spock had the full-blown anaemia he would be in trouble."

Kirk put his head in his hands for a moment and stared down at the desk top before saying, "Bones, I don't know what to do."

McCoy reached out and patted Kirk on the shoulder, as a man would comfort a child. "You'll do what you always do... carry on as best you can with what you've got."

Kirk looked up and grinned. "You're a good friend, Bones. I guess I take you for granted, don't I?"

"Yes," the Doctor said modestly.

"Well, let's hear about Stanley. What's his history?"

"Not much to tell, Jim. I met him in Med School. He went on to specialise in blood diseases, while I did general surgery. I

haven't seen him for must be at least five, maybe six years. Last time was at a party in San Francisco. We didn't have a long chat; he told me he'd been posted to Starbase 5."

Kirk listened carefully, but didn't hear anything that might help. "Has he a family?"

"Yes. It was a shame. His wife died about ten years ago, left him to bring up his son, Rupert, alone."

"How old is the boy?"

"Must be... nineteen... no, sixteen. Yes, sixteen."

"And he lives with his father?"

"Yes."

"Well we'll beam down and talk to them both. Perhaps the son has noticed his father's strange behaviour. I've already asked a friend, Jack Peel, to talk to the hotel receptionist on Base 7 to see if anyone saw anything of Spock."

"Jack Peel - isn't he the Captain of an ore freighter?"

"That's him, Bones. Do you know him?"

"Yes, two broken ribs - fight on Turos Regos."

Kirk smiled. "I can believe it. Jack's a bit of a rough diamond. He promised to call if he found out anything. I hope he does."

Leaving Scott in charge of the Enterprise the two men beamed down to a position a few hundred yards from the apartment rented by Phillips and his son. They pushed the admittance button for several moments before the door was opened by an old woman.

"Yes, can I help you?" she asked them.

McCoy answered, "I'm Dr. McCoy and this is Captain Kirk. We've called to see Dr. Phillips. It's very important. Is he at home?"

The woman glanced behind her and said, "Well, yes, but he isn't too well. I don't think he'll want any visitors."

"I'm an old friend and a doctor. Perhaps I can be of help," McCoy offered.

"He's had some very bad news. It's his son - he's been killed in an accident."

"How?" Kirk asked, failing to hide his curiosity.

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. I'm only the housekeeper," she snapped.

"Who is it?" a voice sounded from inside the apartment.

The old woman turned back inside. "It's a Dr. McCoy and... I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name." She turned back to Kirk.

"Captain Kirk, of the USS Enterprise!" he shouted into the

room.

"I don't want to see anyone. Go away!"

The angry reaction only inflamed Kirk's curiosity; McCoy too was surprised that his old friend should be so abrupt. Before he could react, however, Kirk had stepped past the housekeeper and was inside, so McCoy followed, with the woman trailing behind trying to pull him back.

"Hello, Doctor. I'm Captain James T. Kirk of the Enterprise. I believe you already know my Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Leonard McCoy. You've met my First Officer too, I suspect - Commander Spock." The last part of the sentence was, it seemed to McCoy, a challenge to Phillips to deny it if he dared.

The doctor was sitting in a chair by the window, looking desolate. McCoy noted he was shaking like a leaf.

"I don't understand you. I've never met this Spock."

Kirk walked closer and peered into his face. "Oh Doctor, I think you *do* understand - only too well."

Phillips sighed. There was a short silence, then he turned to where his housekeeper was standing by the open door. "You can go home now, Martha."

When she had gone, closing the door behind her, Phillips broke down and sobbed. "I'm sorry, I had to help them. They had my son - what else could I have done?"

Kirk was unmoved by his tears. "You could have informed the Federation. At least that way only one life would have been lost. Now god knows how many will be."

McCoy pulled his arm. "Go easy, Jim."

"The time for that has long gone, Bones. Will the Klingons go easy with Spock?" He turned back to the sagging figure before him; he would not let any pity for Phillips prevent him getting to the facts. "Dr. Phillips, tell me from the beginning what happened." The tone of his voice was that of an officer giving an order.

The doctor held his head in his hands in a display of complete dejection.

Kirk moved closer, and kneeling by Phillips' side said quietly, "Dr. Phillips, I do understand what you are going through. My First Officer... was a very close friend. Please, if there is anything you can tell us that will help to find the people responsible for their deaths, I promise you I won't rest until they are made to pay - in full. They did kill your son, didn't they?"

"Yes. It wasn't an accident. They sent me proof - a fing..." He couldn't continue.

Kirk nodded. "They will pay."

Phillips looked into the hazel eyes, knowing Kirk would indeed keep that promise. "Captain, I'm very sorry. It was stupid not to have tried to do something to..." He began to sob again.

McCoy came and put a hand on his shoulder in an attempt to ease his distress. After a time the doctor stopped crying and dabbed his eyes with his sleeve.

"I'll do my best to help, but I'm afraid there isn't a lot I can tell you. I arrived home from a morning lecture and found the house a mess. There was blood... Well, someone hit me, and the next thing I remember was waking to find a man sitting watching me. He said I could save my son's life. All I had to do was help his friends. Just a small favour, he said, or they would... kill Rupert."

Kirk nodded in understanding. "I'm sorry, but please try to tell us - what was this man like?"

The doctor thought for a moment. "He was big, tall, with a cowl covering his face - you know, pulled down low. He spoke as if Standard wasn't his native tongue."

"I'll bet it wasn't!" McCoy snapped.

Kirk looked at his CMO and nodded agreement.

Phillips continued, "I said I would do what they wanted if Rupert was sent home safely."

"What did they demand that you do, exactly?" Kirk asked.

"I was to meet Leonard as arranged on Starbase 7, but I wasn't to mention Rupert, or them, and I was to get rid of McCoy as soon as possible. It didn't sound too much to ask in return for Rupert's life, but after Leonard left they took me across the hall to another room to administer a drug to your Vulcan friend."

Kirk stood up quickly and said, "What drug? Why?"

"It was ratusital."

McCoy frowned. "It's a strong sedative - works as a kind of muscle relaxant. It affects the limbs - he wouldn't be able to move for hours."

"How was he?" Kirk asked, the strain sounding in his voice.

"Semi-conscious. I injected the drug, then he passed out. I don't think he was too bad. He had a slight head wound. I couldn't do anything else but co-operate."

"Did they give you any idea of how they were going to get off the base without being seen?"

"No."

McCoy asked, "Stan, did you see them leave?"

"No. I was taken back to the other room and told to stay there for an hour before moving. They said Rupert was safe, and would be home before me."

"They lied." Kirk stated the obvious.

"Yes."

"Well, I bet a month's pay they were Klingon," said McCoy.

Kirk nodded. "Where would they go? It's pointless worrying how they got off the base - that will be Security's problem to deal with later. What concerns us is, where are they now?"

It seemed they had hit a dead end.

McCoy said, "Jim, I think Phillips has told us all he can. I'll give him a sleeping pill and settle him down." With that he took his friend by the arm and led him to the bedroom.

Kirk sat down and began to mull over what they knew so far.

It was ten minutes before McCoy emerged from the bedroom. Kirk looked up and asked, "Bones, is he okay?"

"As well as anyone can be who has lost a son and had a finger delivered by way of proof. Rupert has been butchered, and Stan has to live with the knowledge he betrayed a Federation officer."

Kirk sighed. "The Klingons would only be safe back in their own space. If the ship is travelling at warp speed they would be there in a week; there's no way we could catch them before then."

"Jim, have you thought of another angle on this? Not so much where are they, but why? Why go to all this trouble? If they just wanted to blast at the Federation, there are plenty of ore freighters, passenger ships, even the odd Starship floating around. Why Spock? Perhaps they wanted to lure you."

"Me?" Kirk sounded interested in McCoy's theory. "Why me?"

"Well, perhaps this Klingon has a particular grudge against you."

Kirk pursed his lips, thinking back. "No, I don't remember the name Krath, but sometimes there's no time to exchange names. Perhaps it was Spock. After all, he has served on the Enterprise longer than either of us; perhaps it was a grudge against him, not me."

"And there's something else," McCoy puzzled. "Who sent us the scrambled message from Earth, warning us? How did they know?"

"I'm stumped. Let's get back to the ship. Perhaps Peel has found something."

Seconds after calling the Enterprise they were back on board and just leaving the transporter room when Uhura reported a message coming in from Starbase 7. The Captain and Doctor made their way to the bridge.

The signal came from the captain of the ore freighter, Jack Peel. He hadn't a lot of information to offer, as the number of visitors to the base made it impossible to find anyone who could recall seeing the Vulcan officer or his abductors.

However, it was not all gloom and doom. Peel said that a Klingon ship had been reported cruising not far from the Atoree system.

Kirk thanked his friend, promising to buy him endless drinks



next time they met. It was one promise he secretly hoped he wouldn't have to keep, knowing Peel's unquenchable thirst.

The crew of the Enterprise were put on yellow alert, and members of shore leave parties recalled. As soon as Kirk knew the ship was ready he ordered a course set for the Atoree system at warp speed.

Kirk hadn't slept for 24 hours, and it was beginning to tell. Scott had come to the bridge to make a check on the shields console; he crossed to his Captain and whispered in his ear.

"Captain, ye would do with a wee bit o' shut-eye, beggin' your pardon."

Kirk smiled at his concern. "You're right. Later."

"Well, ye dinna have tae tak ma advice, but ye'll hae the doctor chasing ye."

"I'll grab forty winks as soon as we're comfortably under way, Scotty."

The Scotsman shook his head in exasperation, muttering as he left the bridge, "He's as stubborn as Mr. Spock."

Here was the first real lead as to where the Klingons might be, and Kirk wasn't going to spend time sleeping. He wondered why they were cruising in the Atoree system; it wasn't far from Vulcan space... There was a connection with Spock! So, it was something about Spock and Vulcan that was the reason for all this. But what?

Kirk knew very little about his First Officer, not even his full name - or if he had any other name than Spock. Since Kirk had joined the ship twelve months ago he and Spock had become firm friends, but Kirk had been the only one to talk about his life before joining Starfleet in any detail.

Spock had been skilful in avoiding all references to his past. Kirk had respected his First Officer's desire for privacy. All Federation officers were advised that Vulcans were very careful to keep their emotions hidden; perhaps there was something in Spock's background that he preferred not to think about as it triggered an emotional response.

Kirk knew that Spock's mother was Human, something that Spock had at first been vague about, referring only to a forebear being Human, as if it was something he was ashamed of, and he had only revealed the truth to Kirk a few weeks previously.

The Vulcan had talked about his pet sehlat, which had been his only friend when he was growing up on Vulcan. Kirk hadn't asked what a sehlat was, not wanting to appear ignorant, but when Spock did speak of his youth Kirk was struck by the intense feeling of loneliness that seemed to be the overwhelming impression. Spock had only made scant reference to it, once during a game of chess, and as soon as the Vulcan saw the interest on Kirk's face he stopped talking and the mask fell, covering his face with that blank expression Kirk had come to know so well.

Kirk was surprised at the effect the Vulcan's absence was having on the crew. Considering that Spock usually ate alone, and kept himself to himself during his off-duty hours, he was sorely

missed. A depressed silence had settled over the Enterprise, as if a member of the family was missing.

Several of the crew owed their lives to Spock; others had sought his advice in times of trouble, knowing that he was unaffected by emotions. Kirk too had found Spock a pillar of strength in times of need. He remembered how calm Spock always remained, no matter what chaos was going on; how the Vulcan's quiet serenity gave hidden strength to all around him.

Somehow he must find the same hidden strength to manage without Spock. It would not be easy.

Spock stood outside the transporter room, his sharp ears picking up the gruff sound of Klingon voices. He had no trouble in calculating that there were at least three talking, perhaps more remaining silent. Even with full Vulcan strength he would have been hard pressed to overcome them all and escape without bringing the rest of the crew down on his head. He had to find another way.

He ducked along the dim passage and entered a small room, congratulating himself as he looked at the rows of computer banks lining the walls. His self praise was soon forgotten as the sound of approaching footsteps reached his ears. He squeezed behind the first computer console and waited.

A tall Klingon in the uniform of a trooper came into the room and began laboriously to reprogramme one of the machines, his stubby fingers moving slowly across the keys.

Spock held his breath.

For what, even to the patient Vulcan, seemed like ages the Klingon stood there until he had finished his task; then to Spock's dismay he sat down and began to doze. Spock had hoped that with the reprogramming finished the Klingon would have left, but as it was not to be he took the time to rest his aching limbs.

An hour passed, and the regular sound of snores indicated that the Klingon had fallen asleep. Spock carefully emerged from his hiding place, silently approached the computers, and began to read off the set programmes.

When he had familiarised himself with them he began to enter his own version of a self-destruct sequence, ensuring that there was no override. His long tapered fingers flew over the keys, the Klingon script presenting no problem to his brilliant mind. He was determined that the ship would go, even if he had to go with it.

During the last few moments his eyes refused to focus unless he stopped and rubbed them with the back of his hand. His sight was deteriorating rapidly. He couldn't shake off the giddy faintness, and had to lean against the wall for support. Spock programmed the ship to destruct in twenty minutes; his task completed he left the room, the Klingon still asleep, unaware how close to death he was.

Spock staggered against a bulkhead and fell to his knees, where he had no choice but to remain for several moments until he regained his balance. He pulled himself to his feet and made his way towards the hangar deck, where his only remaining chance of escape lay.

From a safe distance he watched the comings and goings of the maintenance crew. When it seemed as if the entrance was deserted he made a quick dash from his hiding place and dived into a gloomy corner, flattening himself against the untidy pile of crates scattered there. He thought how the Captain of the Enterprise would react if he found such a mess on his own shuttle deck.

It was the first time for hours he had let his thoughts drift back to his friend. He felt an ache in his chest, caused not by the sickness that invaded his body but by sadness at the knowledge that he was very unlikely to see Jim again.

He suppressed the emotion and began to move slowly, keeping the crates and shadow as cover. His breath was coming in gasps, and he was aware that he was running a high fever. Was this feeble attempt at escape really worth the effort? He was dying... he knew that now. He could just sit down and wait. The self-destruct sequence would take care of the Klingon ship, the mindsifter, and the pain too.

It would be so easy. His body cried for rest. Every movement was an enormous effort now. It would be logical to submit to the obvious. But the Human half would not give in to logic; if there was even a faint chance of survival, he must take it.

There was a guard standing beside a small shuttlecraft. Another stood by the manual control panel for the bay doors. Spock edged to a position near the panel and waited until the Klingon's attention was elsewhere, then he stealthily manoeuvred himself behind the trooper and applied a neck pinch. The Klingon dropped to the floor and Spock, after releasing the bay door lock, began to drag the heavy figure out of sight.

Something made the guard at the shuttle turn in time to see his colleague's legs vanishing into the shadows. He pulled his disruptor from his belt and moved slowly forward.

Spock had not remained still, and as soon as the guard left his post the Vulcan doubled round behind him and made a dash for the shuttle. With a mighty effort he pulled himself up into the hatchway to the cargo hold.

The guard, finding his partner unconscious, ran to the alarm button and slammed his fist onto it, producing a piercing siren and flashing light.

Spock made his way to the control cabin, and rubbing his eyes in an attempt to focus on the unfamiliar controls, knowing there was no time to waste, set the shuttle into motion. A signal opened the bay doors, and he said a silent prayer that they would remain that way long enough for the shuttle to take off. Luck was with him, and the shuttle separated from the mother ship before the bridge crew could set the override and close the bay doors again.

Krath was furious when he realised that he had lost his prisoner. Yelling threats to his terrified crew he ordered the shuttle destroyed, but as the small craft was lined up on the scanners another ship appeared on the screen.

"Identify!" Krath yelled to the scanner operator.

"Starship... Federation."

"Cloak now!" Krath ordered.

The lights flickered, and the giant Bird of Prey faded from sight. But time was running out. Only seconds remained until the self-destruct became operative.

Spock didn't see the Starship that swooped towards the Klingon's last known position. He didn't see the Enterprise. He had collapsed into a deep coma, leaving the small ship to hurtle unchecked into space unnoticed by the Starship, just a small speck among so many, its image clouded by the effects of the cloaking of the larger Klingon ship.

### Retribution

Kirk watched as the giant Klingon ship cloaked.

"Shields up!" he ordered.

The red alert sounded, but before the crew had time to reach battlestations there was a mighty explosion. Space lit up with fire for several seconds.

"Brace for impact!" Kirk yelled into the intercom.

Before he had finished the warning the ship was tossed like a toy. Crew members fell about as they tried to ride the storm caused by the destruction of the Helio.

Kirk slammed his fist onto the intercom button again. "Kirk to sickbay. Bones?"

"We're okay, Jim," came the answer.

"I expect you'll be busy for a while. Report when you can." A pause, then, "Captain to Engineering. Scotty?"

"Here, Captain. What the heck have ye been doing up there?"

"Scotty, I think we just lost the Klingon ship. Status report?"

"Whit dae ye mean, lost it?"

Before the Captain could answer his Chief Engineer, the voice of Lt. Severan interrupted him. "Sir, considerable debris heading towards us. Suggest we take evasive action immediately."

"Sulu," Kirk called.

The Asian needed no more. The Starship changed course, but even as she did so shuddered as pieces of the destroyed Klingon ship impacted on the shields.

"Damage report!" Kirk called above the clamour of the alarm.

Scott's voice crackled between the static. "Decks four and five, minimal damage. Shields are holding - just."

"Good. Turn that alarm off, someone," Kirk ordered.

Silence returned immediately.

When the Enterprise emerged into clear space Kirk looked around the bridge, satisfying himself that all the crew were safe. He turned to the science station where Severan was bent over the scanners as Spock would have done had he been there. The familiar pose brought a lump to his throat. He turned away abruptly without being able to give the order he had prepared.

Uhura called to him. "Captain, there's a message for Dr. McCoy from Starbase 5. Shall I put it through to sickbay?"

Kirk hesitated for a moment. "The Doctor may be tied up in theatre. See if it's urgent, or if they can leave a message."

"Yes, sir." Uhura listened for a moment, then said, "It's Dr. Phillips."

"Okay, check if Dr. McCoy is free to take it."

Uhura patched through to sickbay and spoke for a moment to Nurse Chapel. She turned again to Kirk. "Dr. McCoy is busy in theatre, sir."

Kirk nodded. "Right, put it through to me."

The doctor's voice sounded clear. "Captain Kirk? I was hoping to speak to Leonard."

"Yes, I'm sorry, Doctor, but we've had a rough ride and Bones is busy with the injured. I'm sure you understand. Can I relay a message?"

"Yes, you can. I felt very badly about my part in the disappearance of your First Officer. I've tried to make amends, and I hope I have. I may have found a treatment that will help your Vulcan friend, when you find him. I was talking with a Romulan specialist, and they have a similar illness which has responded very well to a drug. I will pass the formula and dosage through to your computer, if you can arrange for access. Tell Leonard I've made slight alterations to allow for the Human/Vulcan variations."

Kirk gripped the arm rests of the command chair, knuckles white. "I'm very grateful for your help, Doctor, but I'm afraid my... Science Officer... was killed a few moments ago when the Klingon ship he was held on self-destructed." He swallowed hard, pulling himself together, aware of the bridge crew's eyes on him. "But I will be only too pleased to receive the drug formula. If you will relay the information our computers will pick it up. It may help others, although I am not aware of any other Human/Vulcan personnel in the Federation at this moment."

Uhura knew by the sound of Kirk's voice that he was very near to breaking down. She said very gently, "Sir, the channel's open."

"Pipe it through, Uhura."

"Yes, sir."

The bridge became very quiet as the crew came to terms with the events of the last few days.

McCoy's voice broke the silence. "Jim, I'm on top of it at

last. Two broken legs, James and Fisher, the usual cuts and bruises, but nothing to worry about."

Almost to himself Kirk answered, "No, nothing to worry about."

"Are you all right, Jim?" McCoy asked, concern in his voice.

Kirk rubbed a hand across his eyes. "Yes, Bones."

"Well you don't sound too good to me. I'm coming up."

"That's not necessary."

"I'm the Doctor. I decide that."

Kirk was secretly glad to see McCoy; he needed a friend.

McCoy took one look at him and ordered him to his cabin, brooking no arguments.

Kirk sat on his bunk, looking for all the world a broken man.

McCoy poured two large brandies. "Here. For purely medicinal reasons I want you to drink this."

"Bones, Spock was on that ship."

"Yes, I know." The Doctor took a large gulp of brandy.

Kirk continued, "I let him down. I wasn't there when he needed me."

"Jim, there was nothing you could have done, believe me."

Kirk left the brandy untouched. "I just feel so..." His voice tailed off into silence.

McCoy didn't know what to say to ease his friend's suffering. He too felt the loss of Spock. After a while the Doctor said, "Perhaps Spock was already dead before the ship blew up."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" Kirk snapped, bitterness in his voice.

McCoy shook his head wearily. "I don't know, Jim. I hope so."

Kirk's head hung over his knees. McCoy had never seen him so depressed. He sat down beside his Captain.

"Listen, Jim, you know what they were probably doing to Spock. He would rather have died than give them the pleasure of seeing a Vulcan break. He would have, eventually. You wouldn't have wanted that. Be honest. You said yourself that Spock was better off dead." He let his words sink in before continuing, "And have you forgotten the most important factor in all this? He was sick. If the anaemia had developed he would have died, and there wasn't anything we could have done to save him."

"Bones, I know you're right. It's just so hard to accept that he's gone."

"I know, Jim. I've lost patients before, but this is different."

Kirk tried to pull himself together, to gather the strength he would need to continue as Captain. After all, there were over four hundred lives depending on his leadership.

"By the way, Bones, Dr. Phillips contacted the ship a short while ago. He reckons he may have found a drug that will cure the anaemia."

"Good god, has he?"

"So he says. It's being piped into the memory banks now. Too late to be of any use to..."

McCoy cut in angrily, "Don't say it! That isn't the way to look at it, Jim. I'm glad. Do you know why? Because Phillips could so easily have given up after Rupert's death. It would have been so easy... But no. He had the guts to go on, and now he may have saved hundreds of future lives. Spock would have liked to know that his illness led indirectly to Phillips finding a reason to live."

Kirk said nothing, but he knew McCoy was gently giving him advice in his own roundabout way.

"Thanks for everything, Bones," he said finally.

McCoy looked a little flustered. "I guess I'll be around if you want a chat, or a game of chess... not that dimensional stuff, though."

Kirk walked over to the unfinished game that he had been playing with Spock. He picked up a king and turned the piece over and over before carefully putting it back into place. "No, Bones. I won't be playing chess."

"Well in that case, work may be the best medicine for you. Keep busy, but get enough food and sleep, or I'll have your tail, you hear?"

Kirk smiled; whenever Bones got emotional his deep Southern accent came to the fore. "Okay, Doctor." He made his way back to the bridge, and resumed command from Sulu.

Suddenly Severan swung round towards him. "Sir, there's a Klingon shuttlecraft. I think it's from the Helio."

Kirk felt cold hatred sweep over him. "Chekov, put it on screen."

The Russian obeyed. The star field disappeared, to be replaced by a small craft weaving a rather erratic course, its speed increasing.

Chekov turned to his Captain. "Sir, it's going to burn itself up."

Kirk peered at the screen. "I wonder if Krath managed to escape the explosion?"

"I wouldn't put anything past a Klingon," Sulu said with feeling.

"Sir!"

Kirk swung round. Severan looked white and shaken.

"Sir, I'm reading Vulcan life signs."

"What!" Kirk stared at her. He repeated, "What? What did you say?"

Severan looked as though she didn't believe it herself. She licked her lips, and checked again to be sure. "I have a Vulcan life reading emanating from the shuttlecraft, sir. It is extremely faint."

"Good god! Spock?" Kirk muttered. Then, louder, "Sulu, get in as close as you can." He thumbed the intercom. "Transporter room."

Kyle's clear voice came in answer. "Transporter room."

"Kyle, I want you to beam every life form off that Klingon shuttle, on my command."

"Yes, sir."

The giant Starship edged nearer to the shuttle. Sulu's face was a mask of concentration. The shuttle was beginning to vibrate as its speed increased past its safety margin.

Chekov said quietly, "It seems as if it's out of control, sir."

"You may be right," Kirk agreed. "Gently... gently... Mr. Kyle - now!"

From the bridge there was no indication of whether the life form on the shuttle was safely aboard when the craft disintegrated, to join the rest of the Helio.

Kirk waited, then Kyle's voice broke the silence. "Medical team to the transporter room. Captain, we have him."

Kirk ran to the turbolift, reaching the transporter room to find McCoy bending over a grav stretcher. "Bones?"

The Doctor looked up, then stepped back far enough for Kirk to see the still body on the stretcher. There was no mistaking the slight green tinge to the skin, even with the deathly pallor, the elegant ears, the dark slanted eyebrows.

"Spock!"

Kirk pushed forward to get closer to his friend, but McCoy held him back.

"No, Jim. Not yet. Let's get him to sickbay first."

"Were there any others aboard?" Kirk asked Kyle.

"No, sir. Mr. Spock was alone."

"Thank you, Mr. Kyle. Good work."

Kyle smiled. "No trouble, sir, made easy by the Helmsman."

Kirk followed McCoy and his team of medics to sickbay, and was



politely but firmly told to wait outside the examination room. He paced up and down for what seemed to him like hours.

Nurse Chapel came out with a cup of coffee for him. She looked radiant, her eyes sparkling. He had never noticed it before, but while she was not an overt beauty there was a classic loveliness about her. "Here you are, sir."

"Thank you, Nurse Chapel."

She smiled again. "Oh sir, I think he's going to be all right."

Kirk didn't have to ask who she was talking about. Since she had joined the ship's complement she had worshipped Spock from afar, and although he had given no sign that he was aware of her devotion, Kirk knew that there was very little that Spock missed. It was highly unlikely that he was unaware of Nurse Chapel's love, even if he pretended otherwise. Perhaps, deep inside that stony Vulcan exterior, Spock's Human half felt some love for her? Kirk knew that it was extremely hard to resist such unselfish devotion.

The door of the examination room slid open and McCoy came out. Kirk tried to read the expression on his face, but failed.

"Well, how is he?"

McCoy frowned. "Not good."

Kirk's face dropped.

McCoy smiled. "But he'll make it."

Kirk felt as if the floor had suddenly vanished, and he found himself leaning against the wall for support. "Really? He'll be okay?"

"With a lot of care, which I'm sure Nurse Chapel here will be only too pleased to give."

She blushed.

Kirk grinned. "Thanks, Bones."

"Don't thank me, Jim. I'm just a country doctor. You should be thanking Dr. Phillips. That, and the fact that Spock is half Human. I'm looking forward to telling him that if it wasn't for the Human blood factors that he hates so much, he'd be dead by now."

Kirk smiled. "You're right about Phillips, but what can you say to a man who has done so much?"

"Could try 'Thank you' for a start," McCoy said simply. "After all, it would be the logical thing to do."

